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UNKNOWN

By

Mrs.

E.D.E.N. Southworth

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Musa.

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UNKNOWN

A Novel

BY

MRS. E. D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH

Author of the "Hidden Hand," "Self-Made," "Winning Her Way," "Only a Girl's Heart," "A Deed Without a Name," etc., etc.

NEW YORK:

ROBERT BONNER'S SONS, PUBLISHERS.

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UNKNOWN; or, THE MYSTERY OF RAVEN ROCKS, is one of Mrs. Southworth's most characteristic stories. The breadth of the plot, the varied scenes through which the narrative runs, the tragic nature of some of the circumstances, the wildness and grandeur of the mountain scenery, the elegance and refinement of the social life depicted, and—above all—the beauty, accomplishments and daring spirit of the heroine, afford Mrs. Southworth abundant opportunity for the exercise of those literary powers which have made her name a favorite in all the households of the country.

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UNKNOWN;

OR, THE

MYSTERY OF RAVEN ROCKS

CHAPTER I.

MUSA.

Who was her father?
Who was her mother?
Had she a sister?
Had she a brother?—Hood.

It was a cold, dark and stormy night in December. A north-east wind blowing a gale drove floods of rain before it, lashing the houses and drenching the streets.

But most furiously the storm raved around a lonely old mansion-house, that stood in a grove of tall, bare poplar trees, in its own grounds, on a bleak hill north-east of the Capitol, in Washington.

It was a great square, dark building, a black block against the stormy night sky, a denser shadow amidst other shadows.

One single light streamed through the crimson curtains of a bay-window of the drawing-room, showing that life was there.

It was a large, lofty, oak-panelled room, decorated in the olden style and fitted up with quaint antique furniture. It was lighted by a central hanging chandelier of wax-can-

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dles, and warmed by an immense fire of glowing hickory logs in its open fireplace.

Under the chandelier, and before the fire, stood a curious round table of mosaic work.

At this table, in two crimson velvet arm-chairs, opposite each other, were seated two persons—a gentleman and a lady.

The first was a tall, spare man about sixty years of age, with a high forehead, keen blue eyes, a slender aquiline nose, and a long chin, all framed in by light silver-gray hair and whiskers.

He looked like a doctor of divinity, but he was not such. He was Mr. Lyttleton Locke, of the eminent firm of Locke & Keyes, attorneys and counsellors at law.

He was, besides, the bachelor master of the house, and legal guardian of Musa Percie, the young lady who sat opposite him, still dressed in her travelling suit; for only that day he brought her from the Carrollsburg Convent School, where she spent nearly all the years of her young life, and only that hour he had brought her home to his own house.

Musa Percie was a splendid beauty. Her form was tall, full, well rounded and perfectly proportioned. Her head was elegantly shaped and covered with shining, rippling blue-black hair, partly gathered into a glistening mass of ringlets at the back of her head, and partly escaping in glittering curls about her lovely face. Her eyes were large, dark, lustrous, and full of soul. They were shaded with long black eyelashes, and arched with slender jet-black eyebrows. Her features were of the purest classic type. Her complexion was clear, fair and pearly, save where, on the cheeks and lips, it glowed with a rich roseate bloom.

She wore a travelling suit of fine black cashmere, and a

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black felt hat with a tuft of black feathers, fastened by a jet buckle. She was wrapped in a rich Russian sable fur mantle, and carried a muff of the same on her lap.

Thus I have attempted to describe the person and dress of Musa Percie; but I know neither pen nor pencil could portray the radiant beauty of her smile, the rich melody of her voice, or the winning grace of her every motion.

She sat there, evidently waiting with impatience for what her guardian might say or do. On the mosaic table between them stood a small Japan cabinet, secured with a strong little brass padlock.

"I will detain you but a few minutes, my dear, before I send you to your room. In this box," said the lawyer, rising and laying his hand upon the Japan cabinet—"in this box, Miss Percie, you will find the title deeds, policies, releases of trust, and all other documents relating to your inheritance. You had better take them with you to your chamber when you go." And so saying, he pushed the cabinet toward her.

She glanced down upon it with weary, indifferent eyes, and answered:

"But, Mr. Locke, I beg you will still keep charge of them as before. I should probably mislay or lose them. I know nothing about such things."

"As your retiring trustee and guardian, I deliver them up. And in doing so, let me congratulate you, Miss Percie, upon your entrance on the possession of estates that render you, at this moment, perhaps the wealthiest woman on the Western hemisphere," said the lawyer, taking her hand and shaking it heartily.

She dropped her eyes, and bowed slowly, while a singular smile of sorrow, if not even of scorn, curved her beautiful lips. And then, as if repenting her cold reception of

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her guardian's congratulations, she said gravely and sweetly:

"I thank you, Mr. Locke, for your kind words, and for far more than those. I thank you for the many long years of care you have bestowed upon me and my affairs."

"A duty no less than a pleasure, my dear," said her guardian.

"And you will continue that kind oversight; for what should I do without you? As my ex-trustee, you have given up these documents. As my solicitor, I beg you will receive them again," said Miss Percie, pushing the casket back toward the lawyer.

"I will take charge of them for the present, since you seem to wish it," replied Mr. Locke, with a bow. "And now, my dear," he added, "you will allow me to ring for your maid to attend you to your room, which must by this time be ready for you."

Mr. Locke rang the bell. The summons was answered by the appearance of a pretty mulatto girl, neatly clothed in a black alpaca dress and white collar and apron, bearing in her hand a lighted wax-candle in a silver bracket.

Miss Percie gathered her costly furs and followed her attendant from the room.

"You have been quick, Servia. You have already changed your dress, I see," she said, as she followed her maid up the broad flight of polished black walnut stairs that led to the upper stories.

"Yes, Miss. I hurried so as to be ready to wait on you. This is the room, Miss," answered the girl respectfully, as she opened a door on the right hand of the upper hall, at the head of the landing, leading into a chamber immediately above the drawing-room.

It was a large old-fashioned room, quaint, antique and

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interesting, but Musa Percie scarcely noticed it. Her eyes were fixed upon a middle-aged mulatto woman, whose stout form was neatly clothed in a black stuff gown, with a white head handkerchief, white neck handkerchief and white apron, and who stood by the fire poking it up into a blaze.

"Aunt Cassy! Oh, Aunt Cassy! Is that you? What a surprise! Oh, I am so glad to see you!" exclaimed Musa, dropping all her pride and reserve, and hurrying, with both hands held out, to meet and greet her old nurse.

"And did she know me? And did my baby know its poor ole Aunt Cassy, after all dese long years?" sobbed the woman, as she folded the young lady to her motherly bosom.

"To be sure I knew you. Shouldn't I know the only creature in the world who ever showed me any love at all?" said Musa, gently releasing herself from the close embrace, and taking the dark face between her hands and looking lovingly in it.

"It 's bin ten year or more, chile, since I seed you—'deed it is. An' you a mite of a baby no more 'n so high," sobbed the woman, holding her hand a little way above the floor.

"I was eight years old, Aunt Cassy."

"So you was! Jes about. And now you 's eighteen. Jes about," said Aunt Cassy, after she had slowly counted with her fingers. "And to think how tall and fine you 's growed, to be sure! I shouldn't a knowed you from your size, honey, but I should a knowed you from your eyes and your smile, even if you hadn't a spoke. You 's got your mother's own eyes, and your father's smile, honey."

"Oh, Aunt Cassy, tell me about my father and mother," said Musa, in a voice of entreaty.

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The effect of her words was strange.

The woman suddenly dropped upon her chair, threw her white apron over her face and head, and began to rock herself to and fro, with moans and groans.

"What is the matter, Aunt Cassy?" inquired Musa, bending over her in surprise and distress.

"To think as you should ax me dat! To think as you should ax me dat!" moaned the woman, seesawing backward and forward.

"But why not? Why shouldn't I ask after my father and mother?" persisted Musa, turning sick at heart with some vague fear.

"Hush, honey, hush! you don't know what you axes. Dere, what a ole fool I am! A lettin' out too—— Dere, I an't to be trusted. I better shet up my mouf, and keep it shet!" said Cassy, grimly clinching her teeth and vigorously rubbing the tears from her face with the end of her white apron.

"Then you will not tell your poor motherless and fatherless child anything about her parents?" sighed Musa, sitting down at her old nurse's feet and pleading with her as she would not have pleaded with a queen.

"I can't tell you, honey; 'deed I can't. An' I don't want to neither. I 's swored on de good book not to, neither. Ax your gardeen. Ax Marse Lawyer Locke. He 's de one. 'Haps he 'll tell you. Dough I hopes he won't. Dere, I'm a lettin' of it all out again. I can't keep my foolish old mouf shet; but I kin talk about somefing else," said Aunt Cassy, resolutely rising, and as it were gathering herself together.

Musa Percie also arose to her feet, with a deep sigh, and a firm determination to get the whole truth of her parentage from her guardian that night.

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That some awful calamity, some deep dishonor, some unutterable horror overshadowed and darkened her parentage and birth, she knew too well—she knew by many infinitesimal signs that had appeared from her earliest childhood to the present hour.

That it was no ordinary reproach, no commonplace sorrow which had thrown so black a cloud over the close of her parents' life and the opening of her own; that their lives had gone down, and her own had arisen amid a storm of wrath, horror and despair, she had every reason to believe; that their story and her own had been jealously guarded from her knowledge, she had every reason to *know*.

Now she was firmly resolved to wrest the whole truth from her guardian. And when Musa Percie formed a fixed resolution, it was very difficult for any one to withstand it.

But first there was one question she must ask her old nurse, and to which she must insist upon an answer, notwithstanding the grimly closed lips of the latter, for this was a question upon which she could not enter with her guardian or with any other man.

"Servia," she said, "leave the room for a few moments."

When the girl had gone, and the young lady and her old nurse were left alone, Musa began:

"Aunt Cassy, there is one question that I *must* ask you, and that you *must* answer. For if you keep silence I shall know what to believe."

"Mercy on me!" exclaimed Cassy, in alarm.

"Listen and reply. Am I the child of lawful wedlock?" gravely inquired Musa.

The woman turned up her head sideways like a listening bird, and after a perplexed silence of a few minutes, asked:

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"Is you *which*, honey?"

"Am I the child of lawful wedlock?"

"Child o' Lorful Wadlock? Lor'! *no*, honey. Hi, Miss Musa, what put that in your head? Your name an't 'Wadlock,' is it? It 's *Percie*. I never knowed anybody o' that other name. I *did* know a Lorful Johnson once, but he was a old culled gentleman as has been in glory this thirty year or more. 'Lorful Wadlock' indeed! Dunno who he is. Some poor white trash, I reckon. *You 's* Miss Percie!" said Aunt Cassy, tossing her head.

"You don't understand me, Nurse. What I wish to ask was this: Were my parents married?"

Aunt Cassy looked at her young mistress in amazement for a moment, and then burst forth indignantly:

"Was your parents married? Well, Miss Musa, I never spected to get mad long o' you de longest day I lived. But I 's mad *now*. I *is*. Was your parents married? Yes, Miss, dey *was* married. You might a knowed dat; else how *you* spect *you* going to be here, a heiring of all deir riches? Which I dressed my dear young lady for her weddin' *myself*, I *did*, as sure as she 's in glory now. An' you to ax me—— Well, I wish you was eight year ole 'stead o' eighteen. *I 'd* let you know."

"You 'd spank me, wouldn't you, Nurse? Well, you may spank me, now, if you like," said the young lady, smiling, for one great load was lifted from her mind. "I beg your pardon, Nurse; and their pardon who are in glory. But, oh, you do not know how at times the gloom and horror that overshadows their deaths and my birth oppress and darken my soul, and how deeply I long to penetrate that mystery."

"Hush, chile! I raly dunno more 'n half you 's a talkin' about. But ef it 's about *dem*, you ax Marse Lawyer

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Locke. He 's your gardeen. He 's de one. Ax *him.* 'Haps he 'll tell you. Dough hopes he won't. Don't ax me, I gwine talk bout somefin else. An' you 's better get ready for supper. Here supper been ready more 'n an hour, an' you an't tetched to take off your things yet. Better let me call in Servy. She got de keys o' your trunks."

"Yes, call her, Aunt Cassy," agreed the young lady.

And Cassy opened the door and summoned the lady's maid.

And then, as if she feared to keep silence, lest her young mistress should question her, Cassy rattled on, as she said she would, "about something else" than the subject of their former conversation.

"Nurse, where did you come from last?" inquired Miss Percie.

"From de ole plantashun, honey, and glad enough to get away from de ole haunted hole! Dere, I 've gone and done it again."

"Done what? What have you done? From what old plantation did you come? And why do you call it an old haunted hole?" inquired Musa anxiously, catching up her nurse's words.

"Dere, don't ax me any more questions, honey. 'Tan't fair, seein' how I keep on talkin' wid my mouf. My mouf gwine to cut off my head some of dese days, I know it is, dere!" said Cassy, grimly closing her teeth, and marching out of the room.

"Servia, give me a fresh handkerchief, a plain one," said Musa, as she gave a last glance at the mirror before descending to the drawing-room.

A queenly face and form were reflected in the tall mirror; but she was very plainly, though becomingly attired.

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She wore a rich black corded silk dress, made full, and with a short train, and an English thread lace collar, fastened by a pearl brooch, her only ornament, and thread lace under sleeves to match the collar. Her shining, curling blue-black hair was worn in the careless way in which she always wore it, partly rippling and glittering around her forehead and ears, and partly gathered into a rich, glistening mass of ringlets at the back of her head.

Thus she passed down to the drawing-room, where her guardian awaited her.

Mr. Locke, with the stately courtesy of the olden time, met her, and led her to a seat, immediately touched the bell, the sliding doors were drawn back, and a negro footman announced supper.

Mr. Locke offered his arm to his late ward, now his guest, and led her to the dining-room.

A very elegant little table was set for two, and a very dainty little supper was served.

The colored footman, called Selim by his master, waited.

The old lawyer, tired and hungry from his long journey, ate very heartily, and pressed the delicacies of the feast upon his young guest.

But precept and example were both lost upon Musa. She could only make a pretense of eating, to please her host. Her mind was full of the problem of her life's sorrowful mystery, soon, that very night she hoped, to be solved by her guardian.

At length the meal, a weary one to her, was over, and Mr. Locke, with his usual punctilious politeness, led his guest back to the drawing-room, and placed a chair for her accommodation.

When guardian and ward were once more seated opposite each other on each side the fireplace, with the mosaic

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table between them, Mr. Locke, rubbing his hands one over the other in the genial glow, with a cheerful sense of personal comfort, looked kindly at his young companion, and said:

"Now then, my dear, I am entirely at your disposal. You told me that you had much to say to me, and many questions to ask. Say on, my dear. I am all attention."

Musa, thus encouraged to proceed, opened the subject nearest her heart rather abruptly by saying:

"Mr. Locke, I wish you, if you please, to tell me all about my father and my mother."

The cool, self-collected lawyer started and changed color at these words, and he could find no terms in which to answer her.

Some minutes passed, during which she kept her eyes fixed wistfully upon his troubled face. And then, as he continued silent, she spoke again, saying respectfully, though very earnestly:

"Mr. Locke, I am waiting to hear your reply."

"My dear," he answered, struggling with his embarrassment, "I did not anticipate this subject. I really thought that you wished to consult me about your future plans—where you are to live, and with whom; for you know, my dear, that these matters must be thought upon and settled," he added, regaining, with an effort, some portion of his lost self-control.

"I know, I know," she answered impatiently; "but there is time enough to think of all that. It is not of my future, no, nor even of my past, that I wish to speak with you, but of my parents, Mr. Locke. Tell me about my father and my mother."

She had risen, in her earnestness, and stood with clasped hands before him.

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The lawyer arose in perturbation, pushed back his chair, and began to walk up and down the floor, while the young girl watched him, and waited for his words in breathless suspense. Presently he stopped, turned to her, and said :

"Musa ! for Heaven's sake, quiet yourself. Sit down and sit still. I will come to your side and talk to you presently. I will tell you as much as I am permitted to communicate."

She obeyed him, sat down, and resigned herself to patient, nay, rather to *im*patient waiting.

He walked slowly up and down the floor for about fifteen minutes. Then he came and took the opposite seat to her, and, no doubt only to gain more time, he said :

"Will you tell me, Musa, all you really know of your own life, either from hearsay or from your own personal experience ?"

"Do you not already know it ?" inquired the girl.

"Not all of it, of course. And I wish, besides, to discover how much you yourself have found out, that I may know how much I have to tell you."

This bait took, as it was intended to do, and Musa began forthwith to talk about herself.

"I will tell you first what I know from hearsay," she began.

"Do so, my dear," said her guardian.

"First, then, I have heard *this* from my foster-mother, Mrs. Sutton : Eighteen years ago a most singular advertisement appeared in the Washington papers. I have heard that advertisement repeated so often, and it had so strange an interest for me, and it made so deep an impression on me, that I remember it to this day. It was this :

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"'WANTED—Country board for a young child and her nurse, in a respectable private family, where she can have the comforts of a home. The most liberal compensation will be offered, and the most unquestionable references given and required. Communications to be addressed to Messrs. Locke & Keyes, Attorneys and Counsellors at Law, Washington City.'"

"That is correct. I had that advertisement put in myself, of course," said the lawyer.

"That advertisement was answered, as I have been led to believe, by scores of needy women. Among the rest, it was answered in person by Susan Sutton, the pretty young widow of a Maryland farmer, whose appearance so pleased the advertiser that he at once made an arrangement with her to receive the young child and her nurse.

"I have heard Mrs. Sutton say that within a week of the day on which this arrangement was made, on a cold night in January, there came a carriage to the farm, in which was my guardian, Mr. Lyttleton Locke, the advertiser, and with him a fine, healthy-looking young mulatto woman, having in her charge not only one, but two young infants—a white one who was her nurseling, and a quadroon one who was her own."

"Right. On that night I conveyed you, your nurse Cassy, and the child Servia to the farm that was to be your home for several years."

"Long afterward I heard—stop! I should rather say that I *over*heard Mrs. Sutton talking of me, and saying to her gossips that in the first few weeks after my arrival at her house, she had closely questioned and cross-questioned the nurse Cassy in regard to my parentage and birth; but that she never could get any news out of her, beyond the fact that my parents were both 'in glory,' and that they had left me, their only child, a great fortune. She used

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to shake her head and sigh, and say that there was a deep mystery somewhere, and where there was a mystery there was sure to be something very wrong."

"How old were you, Musa, do you know, when you used to overhear such very indiscreet talk?"

"I could not have been more than four or five years old. She used to talk before me, as I sat playing with her own little daughter Meda and with Servia on the floor. She thought, perhaps, that I was too young to take notice of her conversation; but I was not. I always heard it, and remembered it; and it impressed me so much that I always told my nurse Cassy about it, and asked her what it meant."

"And what did Cassy say?"

"She said that Mrs. Sutton was a fool, who talked of things she knew nothing about. And Cassy always forbade me to think anything more about what I heard."

"And the nurse was right. The negro had more brains, in that instance, than the white woman. Mrs. Sutton was very foolish, not to say wicked, to talk as she did," said the lawyer angrily.

"She was not wicked. I am sure of that. I was very happy with her up to the eighth year of my stay, when you came—and it was the first time I had ever seen you, to remember you—and took me away from them all, from Mrs. Sutton and Cassy and my little country playmates; when my poor nurse was so sorry for me, that she was willing for her child Servia to go with me to the distant school, to be brought up as my little maid.

"You left me very happy in my new home, besides being the envy of every other girl in the institution, not one of whom enjoyed the honors of a separate bedroom and a special maid-servant. That must have been some consolation to you, Mr. Locke," said Musa.

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"Yes, it *was* a consolation to me to see how well contented you were. Tell me if your happiness continued," said Mr. Locke.

His suggestion was not a fortunate one. His companion's face clouded over.

"No," she gravely replied. "My happiness did *not* continue. Is it likely, under my circumstances, that it should? Soon I got acquainted with my school-mates, and soon found myself a sort of pariah among them. Other little girls talked of their fathers and mothers. I could not talk of mine. When I was asked about them, I said that they had both gone to heaven when I was a baby. But that was all I could tell of them. And that was not satisfactory. There were other little girls in that large school who had lost their parents in infancy. But they knew all about them—knew who they were, and where they lived; who were their friends and neighbors; how long they were sick, and what they died of; where they were buried; what churches they had belonged to. All these things and much more other little girls knew, either from hearsay or from personal experience, about *their* fathers and mothers. I knew nothing, could tell nothing about *mine*, beyond the bare fact that they had both died while I was a baby. This ignorance brought me into disrepute and under suspicion, even among the most amiable of my school-mates. And sometimes I overheard the elder girls saying things about me that makes my cheeks burn even now to think of. I know, of course, as I knew then, that much of their malice sprang from their envy. They envied me my separate room, my little maid, my good dresses, my pocket-money, and other superior privileges secured to me by your own great kindness, Mr. Locke."

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"An unwise kindness, I am afraid, my child, since it exposed you to envy and ill-will," sighed the guardian.

"But it was not always so. Oh, whenever a pyramid plum-cake arrived for me, you should have seen how many friends I had. I was the most popular girl in the school as long as the cake lasted. It was during these seasons of free feasting and purchased favor that I learned much from my school-mates," added Musa, with a curious smile that meant more than she had spoken.

"You learned much of—*what?*" inquired Mr. Locke, uneasily.

"Of the world, the flesh, and the devil, as regarded from *their* point of view, in contradistinction from the convent's point of view. I do believe, if it had not been for the memory of what I learned from those girls, when the plum-cake had mounted to their heads, I later on should have yielded to the pressure brought to bear upon me, and taken the veil. Every summer they went out to their parents or friends, and spent weeks in sojourning at gay watering-places, or in travelling amid delightful scenery. And every Christmas they went home to the same parents' or friends' houses and entered upon a round of worldly pleasures—parties, balls, concerts, and plays. And when they came back to the convent from their summer travel, or from their winter's pleasures, they used to describe their enjoyment in the most glowing terms, and anticipate their final emancipation from school, and entrance upon all these delights, with the most ardent desire. I could see for myself how intensely they had enjoyed their holiday in the world, and how ardently they longed to return to it. You may judge, my guardian, how their enthusiastic discourse about worldly delights affected *me*, who, being as young as themselves, never left the convent walls, and was told, be-

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sides, that I never *ought* to leave them. I tell you, sir, that I then and there resolved that nothing on earth should ever induce me to become a nun. Little as I knew of my birth and parentage, I knew that I was very rich, and that by my father's will I should come into possession of my inheritance at the age of eighteen, three years before the attainment of my proper majority. So I determined that I would not remain in the convent school one week longer than my eighteenth birthday. And so I wrote and advised you of my determination."

"Yes, my dear, upon which occasion I had some experience of your indomitable self-will. You will admit that I lost no time in acting upon your letter. I sent for your old nurse to come here and prepare to receive you. And then I started at once for your convent school, where I arrived only a few days after the eighteenth anniversary of your birth. I have brought you to Washington, according to your own wish, though much against my own judgment. What can I do for you further? I am quite at your orders, Miss Percie."

"You can tell me all about my parents. I have told you all I know, and you see how little it is. Do you now complete the history," said Musa earnestly.

"Stop one moment, Miss Percie," said the lawyer, still perhaps to gain time. "I may tell you all that I am permitted to tell presently, but first I would like to talk to you a little about your future, or I should rather say your present plans. Where and how will you like to live? What do you purpose to do?"

"To enjoy to the very utmost my personal liberty and my wealth. I intend for this winter to take the most elegantly furnished house I can find in the city; to fill it with accomplished servants; to have handsome carriages and

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horses; to give parties, and balls, and concerts; to wear magnificent dresses and splendid jewels; to indemnify myself, in short, for the eighteen years of suppressed life I have endured up to this time," said the girl, with a look of triumph.

"Musa! Musa! you alarm me. Don't you know that a young unmarried woman cannot act as you propose to do?" exclaimed the lawyer, with a look of deep anxiety.

"I know that *one* young unmarried woman is so fortunately situated that she *can* and *will* do as she likes," said the girl, with gay defiance.

"Would you use your wealth and liberty solely to work your own reckless will? Would you utterly defy the opinion of the world and the counsels of your guardian?"

"My dear guardian, do not worry your good heart about me. But now that I have informed you of what I intend to do, please keep your promise, and answer my questions. Tell me all you know of my birth and parentage."

Mr. Locke paused in his hurried walk up and down the floor, looked at the beautiful, reckless creature who sat there fatally defying him, and saw from her whole attitude and expression that it would be utterly useless to attempt to move her from her mad purpose.

With a deep groan he came and threw himself into his chair, dropped his gray head upon his open hands, and said:

"The story was never intended for your ears. But since nothing that I can advance will persuade you to retire from the world and live the quiet, beneficent life that your circumstances render most expedient for you, I must speak. I must tell you of the horrible tragedy, the household wreck that ruined your home, hurried both your parents into ignominious graves, and threw you, a blighted

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infant with a dishonored name, upon the world. Listen, Musa Percie."

At these terrible words from her guardian, Musa Percie turned ashen pale, sank back in her chair, and grasped its arms with a spasmodic grip.

She did not faint nor flinch, but firmly set her lips and nerved her heart to hear and bear the worst the lawyer had to tell, even as the doomed felon braces himself to brave the death sentence.

The lawyer gazed on her in deep compassion, struggling with the just anger of his soul.

"Why don't you go on?" she whispered, in a voice so low and hollow as to be almost inaudible.

"Musa," he answered, in a very gentle tone, "dear child, I beg your forgiveness for the ruthless words uttered in my madness, and repented as soon as uttered. I wish my tongue had been paralyzed before I spoke the words!"

"But they are spoken, and can never be either recalled or forgotten. And now I charge you by your pledge to tell me the truth," said Musa solemnly.

There was silence between the two for a few minutes, so that nothing was heard but the rain and the wind.

And then the lawyer drew his chair close beside that of his ward, and said:

"I will tell you. And may Heaven support and comfort you now, and guard and guide you hereafter."

She bowed her head in amen to that prayer, and bent herself again to listen breathlessly.

He stooped, and whispered a few words.

She started, with a piercing shriek, clapped her hands to her face, and fell back in her chair, overwhelmed, pallid, dying, to all appearance.

And again silence, like a pall, fell about them.

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And the rain descended, and the wind blew, and beat upon the house.

Gravely and sorrowfully the lawyer regarded her. She sat motionless as death. She sat so long that at last the lawyer spoke again:

"Shall we have this subject over and done with, once and forever? Shall I tell you how it happened?"

"No, no! no, no!" she cried sharply, stretching her hands, palms outward, toward him, in an agony of deprecation and repulsion. "No more! I could not bear it. I should go mad."

And as she spoke her hands drooped powerlessly upon her lap, and her head sank upon her bosom.

The lawyer looked at her in grief and anxiety, muttering to himself:

"She *would* have it. She wrung it from me. But I could find it in my heart to wish that I had been struck speechless before I told her."

Seeing that she neither spoke nor moved again, he grew alarmed, arose, and went hastily into the dining-room and brought a glass of water, and silently offered it to her.

She took it mechanically, and raised it to her parched lips, and then handed it back, for she could not swallow.

"Musa, my dear," said the lawyer, as he set the glass upon the table, "let me ring for your attendants."

"No, no," she answered huskily; "give me your arm to the door of my room, and leave me to myself."

And so saying, she arose from her chair, and took his offered arm.

He supported her as he led her from the room. He perceived that the violent emotions of the last half hour, suppressed though they had been, had reduced her to almost a fainting condition.

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He led her slowly up-stairs and opened the door of her room.

"I thank you, Mr. Locke. Good-night," she said, withdrawing her hand from his arm.

"Can I do nothing else for you, my child?" he anxiously inquired.

"No, nothing," she answered, as she entered her chamber.

He saw through the open door that her faithful maid, Servia, was in attendance. So with a sigh he turned away and went down-stairs.

Then Musa closed the door behind her and advanced into the room.

Servia, who was still busy unpacking the trunks and putting the clothes away in wardrobes and bureaus, looked up and saw the deadly pallor and weakness of her mistress, and flew to her side with anxious inquiries:

"Oh, Miss Musa! what has happened? Have you hurt yourself, or heard any bad news?"

"*Both!* Don't speak to me. Put out the lights. Make it dark as pitch. And go!" she said, in a low, hollow, but imperative tone, as she tottered forward and threw herself, all dressed as she was, upon the bed.

The maid, in alarm, hastened to do her mistress' bidding.

But to put out the lights in that room was not a simple turning off of gas, to be done in an instant.

The room was lighted by seven wax-candles in a hanging chandelier. And little Servia had to go around it with an extinguisher at the end of a long wand and "douse" each "glim," as the sailors would say, in turn, until the room was as dark as its heart-sick tenant could have wished it. It would have been "pitch dark" indeed, but for the dull

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glow of the hickory log fire now burned to a mass of lurid coals.

But Servia did not leave the room, as she had been ordered to do. She was far too much frightened by the condition of her mistress, to do so. As soon as she had put out the last light, under cover of the darkness she went to the rug before the dull fire, and lay down to listen and watch.

But nothing was heard save the roaring of the wind and lashing of the rain.

So hour after hour passed. The great tall clock in the hall below struck twelve, then one. But her mistress neither stirred nor groaned. And at length the little maid fell asleep.

Mr. Locke also passed a troubled night. He arose early, dressed himself, and descended to the small, dark, wainscoted parlor where the breakfast table was set.

The storm of the preceding night had passed away. The winter sun was shining splendidly through the crimson curtained windows, filling the room with a rich, roseate glow, and kindling the silver service on the table into a blaze of light. A ruddy coal fire burned in the grate, and a comfortable, red velvet covered chair stood ready to receive its owner.

Mr. Lyttleton Locke sat down and touched the bell.

Selim, his handsome young mulatto servant, answered the call, bringing with him the morning papers, which he handed his master.

"Lay them down, Selim, and go and knock at Miss Percie's door, and inquire, with my compliments, how she finds herself this morning," said Mr. Locke.

Selim deposited the papers on a stand under the window and went on his errand.

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After a few minutes he returned with a message.

"Miss Percie's respects, and she had recovered from her fatigue, and would join Mr. Locke at breakfast."

"That will do. You may go now, Selim. I will ring when I want you," said the lawyer.

"What an incomprehensible young woman she is," mused Lyttleton Locke, when he was left alone. "She has 'recovered from her fatigue.' That is her cue, is it? No one is to know that anything has happened to disturb her. Very well, I will take her hint."

And he arose and gathered the morning papers together and sat down to read while waiting for his ward.

Mr. Lyttleton Locke was still engaged with his newspapers when the door opened and Miss Percie entered the room.

Her morning toilet had been very carefully made. She wore a jet-black fine merino wrapper, open from the throat, over a fine white linen cambric chemisette; but gathered around the slender waist by a black ribbon belt, fastened with a jet buckle; the skirt falling in heavy folds to her feet.

The flowing sleeves were also open over undersleeves of fine white linen cambric. Her feet were encased in black satin slippers; and her hair was dressed as usual, in clustering, glittering little ringlets about her face, and a rich mass of heavy ringlets at the back of her head. But her face seemed white and hard as marble.

Her guardian cast one rapid, anxious glance up to that pale rigid face, and arose in haste, greeted her and offered her his own easy chair.

She bowed, thanked him and declined it. And then helping herself to a rocker, begged that he would resume his seat.

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The lawyer touched the bell and ordered breakfast to be served immediately. And then turning to his ward, he said:

"I hope you slept well, my dear?"

"I slept not at all. How could it have been possible for me to sleep? But in the long watches of the night I have gathered some strength and matured some plans of which I will tell you," calmly replied Miss Percie.

"You shall tell me nothing, my dear, until you have refreshed yourself with some breakfast. Here it comes," said the lawyer, as Selim entered with a heavily laden tray in his hands.

In a few minutes the guardian and ward sat down at the table.

Mr. Lyttleton Locke, as usual, ate heartily.

Musa Percie merely trifled with the food upon her plate. But she drank two cups of coffee with feverish eagerness.

When breakfast was over and the table cleared, Mr. Locke said:

"You told me, my dear, that 'in the long watches of the night you had gained strength'—strength, I hope, to bear the doom, the unmerited doom that has fallen upon you."

"I told you also, Mr. Locke, that I had matured plans," firmly answered Musa.

"Will you let me hear them?" inquired her guardian dubiously.

"Of course I intend to do so. They are the same plans I hinted to you yesterday, only matured and perfected, and ready to be carried out," she answered.

"Musa! In the name of Heaven, you cannot mean it!" he exclaimed in alarm.

"I certainly do mean it, and nothing on earth shall ever

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make me change my purpose," she answered coldly and firmly.

"After what you have been told?"

"Yes, after what I have been told. *Now*, more than ever before, do I need a life of hurry, excitement, distraction! And I must have it."

"Musa! listen to my counsels, even if you refuse to follow them. Child! your idea of life is a fatal snare to you, if you fall into it. You dream that your beauty, genius and wealth will make you celebrated in the gay world of fashion. My poor child, they will only help to make you notorious in another sort of world. You dream of taking a high position in society. My child, you will find that position to be a conspicuous pillory, in which you will be fixed, the helpless mark of the world's poisoned arrows," he said.

And the next moment he regretted his cruel words, for, as he looked at her, he thought that he had never seen a countenance change so suddenly, or betray such bitter suffering. Her face had been deadly pale before, but now the white skin of her forehead was plaited deeply and darkly between her eyebrows; her eyes were turned inward, as by strabismus, and the corners of her mouth were drawn down in two deep dark furrows; the whole countenance was convulsed, and quivering with agony.

"I suppose," she said, "that the world will never receive me on a fair footing. But I cannot help that. I must go into the world, nevertheless. The quiet life you offer me as a refuge would be, to me, imprisonment, bonds, suffocation, a living death. I could not endure it. I *must* go into the great world, and take a part in it. I *must* have action, excitement. I must have space and freedom, or I die."

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She arose panting, pushed her chair away, and with her head thrown back, and her hands clasped behind her, she began to walk the room with a suppressed fury of impatience, that reminded the lawyer of a lioness pacing her cage.

"Now who," he thought, "looking at that girl, would not half believe in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls? There is something rising in her now that would spring upon her prey, and rend and tear it, if she only had the fangs and claws of her ancestor, the lion, and knew how to get at her victim. Who at least could doubt for a moment the Bible doctrine of original sin and hereditary evil?"

Pity and anger had struggled in the lawyer's bosom from the beginning of his controversy with his ward—pity for her suffering, anger at her reckless obstinacy. But unfortunately his face was formed to show anger rather than pity.

Miss Percie, casting a casual glance at him, saw anger only in his aspect.

"Oh, yes, I know what you think of me," she said, without ceasing her uneasy walk. "I know what you think of me, and you are right. I am selfish, reckless and ambitious. But at least," she added, with a sort of hopeless dignity, "I am not a hypocrite, Mr. Locke."

"Who ever said you were, Musa? Fortunately, honor and truth are hereditary as well as self-will and passion."

As Mr. Locke uttered this implied tribute to her family, Musa came and sat down again.

"And now, Miss Percie," he said, with some little formality, "as you are determined to pursue the difficult and dangerous course you have marked out for yourself, and as I cannot turn you from it, I must do all in my power to

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make it for you as safe and as honorable as possible, if indeed it be possible to make it either safe or honorable at all."

"I thank you, Mr. Locke," she replied.

"And now, my dear, I have business at the Supreme Court which will occupy me the greater portion of this day. I will join you at dinner, however. Here are the day's papers, if you wish to look over them. Good-morning."

And so saying, having laid the *Globe* and the *Intelligencer* on the table beside her, he bowed and left the room.

She remained some time sitting where he had left her, absorbed in thought.

At length she mechanically took up the *Intelligencer*, and began to look over it without feeling much interest in its contents.

At length her eye fell upon the column headed—ARRIVALS AT THE PRINCIPAL HOTELS.

The list was long, for our Senators and Representatives, with their families, and the political adventurers that followed in their train, were flocking in to Washington City for the meeting of Congress that was to take place on the ensuing Monday.

But heading the list of guests at the first hotel, Musa read:

"The Earl of Cressy, Lord Gilbert Caux, Rev. Dr. Bishop, England."

She perused these distinguished names with less of interest than she felt in reading those that followed—Adams, Benton, Clay, Calhoun—names that have since passed into history.

"I shall meet all these celebrities," she said to herself, with a youthful thrill of wonder. "I shall even probably entertain them at my own house—beings who have hitherto

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belonged as exclusively to my dream world, as little to my real world, as the heroes and statesmen of the past—as Drake, or Raleigh, or Burleigh, or Walsingham."

Then she turned to other matters, and read the following:

"PERSONAL.—The young Earl of Cressy and Lord Gilbert Caux, sons of the Duke of Montcalla, with their travelling tutor, the Rev. Dr. Bishop, are at Gadsby's. Their lordships, it is understood, purpose making but a very short stay in Washington, before proceeding on their tour through the Southern States."

Musa Percie read this paragraph with no more interest than she had at first read the names of these English travellers in the list of arrivals. What were these young birds of passage, brilliant though they might be, to her? They had lighted down on Washington City, for a few days or hours, and would soon be on the wing again, flying southward.

And yet, if she had but known how closely and disastrously her destiny was to be interwoven with that of one of them, she would scarcely have passed over their names so carelessly.

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CHAPTER II.

THE YOUNG ENGLISH LORDS.

They are young, and of
That mould which throws out heroes; fair in favor,
And doubtlessly, with each, a form and heart
Would look into the fiery eyes of war.—BYRON.

ON the evening of that same day, a small party of three gentlemen occupied a private parlor in Gadsby's Hotel.

Two of them were quite young, the third was elderly. They were, in fact, the English party of travellers whose arrival in the city had been announced in the morning papers.

They had reached Washington in the midst of the storm on the evening before, had spent this day in driving about the city from one point of interest to another, and had come back to their hotel for a late dinner in their own rooms.

The two young tourists were fine, wholesome looking young fellows, very fair types of their order. They were so near of an age—the elder being nineteen, and the younger eighteen years old—and they were so much alike in face, form, speech and manner, that they may be described together.

Both then were blondes of the fairest Saxon type, with clear pink and white complexions, yellow hair and mustaches, and azure blue eyes. Their features were fine and straight. Their forms were of medium height, and rather

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stout than otherwise. The younger brother was, perhaps, just a little older looking than the elder. Both were as carefully dressed as though they had been dining in a company of ladies and gentlemen, instead of in their own bachelor apartments, and they wore the regulation evening dress of gentlemen, too well known to need description.

Their tutor, Dr. Bishop, was a very large, corpulent old gentleman, with a shining bald head, adorned with a few silver-gray curling locks at the sides and back. He wore a clergyman's dress of black broadcloth, with an ample white cravat. His face was covered with a fine large white handkerchief, as he leaned back in his chair, fast asleep.

"Is he off?" inquired the young Earl, in a low voice, indicating by a slight gesture, the somnolent Falstaff in the arm-chair.

"Off?" echoed his brother with a light laugh. "I should think he was. Hear him! I hope we have no very near neighbors for him to disturb."

"Never mind him, Bert; I am glad he's asleep. Oh, Bert! we have not found her yet."

"No; but then we have only been in the city twenty-four hours."

"But we have not even found out who she is."

"Of course not; I don't see how we should until we find *her*."

"And the time is so very short in which to do that! This is Thursday. We shall stay over Monday to witness the opening of Parli—I mean Congress; and on Tuesday Dr. Bishop purposes we shall take the boat to Richmond. We have but four days here by Dr. Bishop's arrangement. But I tell you, brother, if we do not find her in these four days, I will not leave the city."

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"But, Cressy! Dr. Bishop?" said the young Lord Gilbert, opening his eyes.

"Heaven bless the good old man! But I shall not leave the city until I have found her."

"But what are you going to do about it if you don't find her?" inquired Lord Gilbert.

"Continue to look for her until I do," doggedly answered the young Earl.

"And above all things, what are you going to do about it when you *do* find her?" very pertinently inquired Lord Gilbert.

"I—don't know," replied the Earl.

"It seems to me, Cressy, that you are hardly sane on this subject. You have seen the girl but once, and——"

"Don't call her 'the girl' in that tone, if you please, Gilbert."

"Whee-ew! Well, then, the beauty, the angel. I say you have seen her but once, and then only for a few minutes, as she left the train to enter her carriage."

"A private carriage too. If it had been a hack, we might have found out where it took her," put in the boy Earl, in a tone of despair.

"Well, you saw her only for a few moments, and you rave about her in a way to make one doubt your very identity. If it were my case, now, it would not be so strange. I have been in love, off and on, all the days of my life; from the time I was five years old, when I fell in love with our pretty governess, to the very last week, when I was deeply smitten by—I forget whom. But *you*, Cressy! *you*, who never loved anything but an oar, or a gun, or a dog, or a horse—*you* to be knocked over 'all on a sudden' by the sight of a girl—I beg your pardon—I mean by the vision of a seraphic being, whom you never

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saw but once, and then only for an instant. It is incomprehensible!"

"It is true that I have been all my life quite insensible to all female beauty," replied this stoic of nineteen, "and should doubtless have continued so had I not met my fate in that glorious face. True, I saw her but for an instant, as you say, my dear Gilbert—

> "'Yet my soul that instant caught
> A something it through life had sought,'"

sighed the lover at first sight, pathetically.

"Is it as bad as that? Bless my soul! Now don't do that again, there 's a good fellow, else I shall have to give you up," entreated Lord Gilbert.

"Don't do what?" asked the Earl.

"Don't quote poetry, else I shall think you are quite hopelessly mad," said Lord Gilbert, in a warning manner.

"That—was—from—Thomas Moore," deliberately spoke an unexpected voice from the arm-chair.

The brothers looked at each other aghast. They certainly had not intended to take Dr. Bishop into their confidence.

"I think I must have dropped into a doze, my young friends. What is the hour?" inquired the doctor, slowly drawing the handkerchief from his face, and looking up.

Lord Gilbert consulted his watch, and answered:

"It is half-past ten, Doctor."

"Bless my soul alive! I have slept," said the doctor, rousing himself.

Then, advising the young men not to sit up too late, he bade them good-night and retired to his own chamber.

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"Do you think he overheard us talking about *her?*" inquired Lord Cressy, when he found himself alone with his brother.

"No. We should have discovered it in his countenance, if he had, even if he had said nothing about it, as he would have been sure to have done, you know, if he had heard. No, I don't think he heard a word of it."

"Nor do I," said the young Earl. "So let us go to bed."

They went.

The next morning the weather was uncertain as it is apt to be in our uncertain climate.

Dr. Bishop, feeling some warning twinges of the gout, decided to stay indoors all day.

The two young gentlemen went out together, ostensibly to see the interior of the public buildings, but really to look for "*her*," as the love-sick boy tenderly termed the unknown beauty who had so deeply enthralled his imagination.

At two o'clock in the afternoon the brothers found themselves seated at a table for lunch in a fashionable restaurant at the west end of the city.

"And now what is to be done?" Lord Gilbert inquired.

"Continue to search," replied the young Earl.

"Yes; but first we must pay our respects to our Minister, and before three o'clock also."

"Very well," gruffly assented Lord Cressy. "But afterward we must resume our search."

After luncheon they walked over to the house of the English Minister, which was near at hand, and were very cordially received by the representative of their Queen.

He had not much time to bestow on them, but he very kindly informed them that there was to be a public recep-

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tion at the President's that evening, and that if it would be agreeable, he would call for them in his carriage, and take them to the White House.

This invitation, so courteously given, was gratefully accepted by the young English gentlemen, who soon after took their leave of the Minister.

They spent the remainder of the afternoon in walking up and down the now crowded pavements of Pennsylvania Avenue, peering, as far as politeness would permit, into every beautiful dark face which at some little distance would happen to bear some slight resemblance to that one they were looking for.

They walked so far and so long that even their good English legs, trained on the Sussex downs, Yorkshire heaths, and Scottish hills, were ready to give way under fatigue.

They only returned to their hotel in time for their seven o'clock dinner.

They found Doctor Bishop comfortably ensconced in his large arm-chair, and deep in the perusal of the last number of the London *Times*, which he had been so fortunate as to borrow from the reading-room of the hotel.

After dinner the young gentlemen dressed for the President's reception, and sat down to await the coming of the Minister's carriage.

"We may meet *her* in the crowd at the President's house, Bertie," said the young Earl.

"Nothing more likely," assented the younger brother.

A few minutes after this the Minister's carriage was announced, and the brothers went down.

They were driven rapidly to the White House.

This was the first evening reception of the season, and the attendance was very large.

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The usual throng of carriages blocked up the avenues leading to the front of the house.

And more than the usual crowd of people filled the passages and ante-rooms of the building.

So it was an hour from the moment of their arrival, to the moment that the English party found themselves in the crowded Blue Room, waiting their turn to be presented to the President.

It came at last, and their Minister, after greeting the President, presented in turn each of his young countrymen, who were very cordially received.

His Excellency took time, even on that busy evening, to exchange a few pleasant words with the strangers, before they passed on in the rear of the procession that was filing out toward the East Room.

The English Minister met some of his distinguished brethren of the *corps diplomatique*, to whom he presented his young *protégés*.

And he also named to the latter several eminent American statesmen and officers, as he caught sight of them in the crowd.

But for none of these did the young Lord Cressy care. He thought only of that "glorious face" he waited for to rise and shine upon him.

He looked for that beautiful face in vain.

And when the hour of departure came, he left the White House with his party, suffering under a keen sense of disappointment.

The next day, Saturday, the weather being still uncertain, and the doctor being still gouty, the young gentlemen again sallied forth alone, "to see what was yet to be seen in the city"—that is, to look for the beauty.

And much to the disgust of his younger brother, for

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even good-humored Bertie was getting bored with the subject and tired of the chase, Lord Cressy talked as much and as madly of the "glorious face," and walked as long and as far in pursuit of it, as he had done in any of the three preceding days.

At length, about six o'clock in the afternoon, weary and disappointed, the brothers turned their steps toward their hotel.

"Do call a cab, Cressy," said Lord Gilbert.

"No; for by getting into a cab we lose the last chance of seeing her to-night," answered the Earl.

"Moon-struck madness!" commented Bertie, as he trudged along by his brother's side.

At that moment a sudden great commotion arose in the street, and people began to rush to and fro, as if they were hurrying to get out of the way of something, as a horse came rushing wildly, madly up the avenue, dragging behind him a carriage.

The driver had jumped off his seat, the reins were flying loose, and a lady sat alone in the carriage, clinging desperately to its sides.

The brave English boys saw only the terrible vehicle of death, rushing furiously on to destruction, with the helpless woman upon it.

With one accord they hurled themselves into the street, and at the horse's head.

Lord Gilbert seized the frantic animal by the bit and threw him back upon his haunches, while the young Earl received the falling woman in his arms.

"Good Heaven, it is she!" he exclaimed, nearly overcome with joy.

"*She*" was Musa Percie.

Musa Percie was no light weight. She was what is called

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a very fine young woman. She came down heavily upon the stalwart chest of the English boy, and staggered him, strong as he was.

"I thank—I thank," she panted breathlessly, as she extricated herself from his arms—"I thank you very much."

"Oh, not at all," he answered, in some confusion. "I hope you are not injured?"

"No; only shaken out of breath," she smiled. "But you—you have endangered your life," she added gravely.

"Too happy in doing so," he answered, gazing, with all his soul beaming from his bright blue eyes, upon her beautiful pale face. He did not mean to be impudent; he could not help gazing.

A crowd had gathered around them.

"I thank you more than I can express, sir, for words are poor in this case," said Miss Percie, with a graceful inclination of the head to Lord Cressy. Then immediately turning toward the bystanders, she inquired:

"Where is my coachman? Will some one please to see?"

There was a considerable stir in the crowd for a few minutes, but nothing resulted from it. No coachman belonging to the lady could be found.

"Him jumped off his box a mile down the avenue, and cut it like hevery think t'other way, Miss," called out a boy from the crowd.

"Then he has made the best of his way home, I suppose," said Miss Percie, in some embarrassment.

"If you will do me so much honor," began the young Earl, in some slight confusion—"if you will trust me to take your fugitive coachman's place, I will with pleasure undertake to drive you safely wherever you wish to go."

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"Thanks," answered Musa, with a bow, "many thanks; but——"

She paused.

"You need not hesitate to trust my brother, Madam. He is a skillful driver, I assure you," put in Lord Gilbert, who still stood, like a groom, at the horse's head, and who probably considered that it was about time some notice should be taken of *his* good services.

"It is not that I doubt the gentleman's skill," said Miss Percie. "But——" And again she paused.

Lord Cressy, who now thought he understood the lady's scruples better than his brother did, began to feel in his breast pocket, and presently drew forth a card-case and took from it a card, which he handed, with a bow, to Miss Percie.

"I fear, however," he said, with a laugh, as he saw her scrutinizing the little bit of pasteboard, "there is not light enough to enable you to decipher it. Permit me to name myself. I am Earl Cressy, a stupid young Oxonian, travelling with my brother and our tutor, for improvement. But I know how to drive a horse, and I can take you safely anywhere you may wish to go. Shall I have the pleasure of doing so?"

"With many thanks, Lord Cressy. I am Miss Percie, and I reside at present with my guardian, at the 'Poplars.' It is there that I wish to go," said the young lady, preparing to resume her drive.

With much grace, the young Earl put the young lady in her carriage, and then took his own seat on the box.

"Go home and explain my absence to the doctor, Bertie," he said, as he took the reins from his brother's hands.

"Exactly," smiled Lord Gilbert, with a bow and a wave

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of his hand, as he watched the carriage turn away. He then returned to the hotel and went up at once to the parlor occupied by his party; there he found the gouty doctor seated in his arm-chair, reading the last number of the "Quarterly," while waiting for his dinner.

To him Bertie related the adventure of the runaway horse.

"And Lord Cressy has undertaken to drive the girl home. Dear, dear! dear me! how very irregular and imprudent! Was there no one else who could have performed that service?" testily inquired the tutor.

"No one offered to do so, at least," said Lord Gilbert.

"And no one knows who the girl is, or what she is," growled the tutor.

"We knew that she was a young woman in danger and distress. That was enough for Cressy, and for me," said Lord Gilbert emphatically.

"Oh, these boys! these boys! I never feel easy about them, except when they are in bed and asleep, and even then I never feel sure that they haven't left their door open to burglars, or the gas burning in a draft, within an inch of the bed-clothes," grumbled the tutor.

Bertie rang for dinner as the quickest means of stopping the old gentleman's mouth.

Meanwhile the young Earl, in the seventh heaven of happiness, drove on toward the "Poplars," whither Miss Percie had given him easy directions to find their way.

But very few words were exchanged between them. Conversation was not easy. He was sitting immediately in front, and a little above her.

"My guardian will be very grateful to you for the service you have rendered me, Lord Cressy," said Miss Percie.

"Believe me, this service, this privilege rather, gives me

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the greatest pleasure," said the young Earl—"a pleasure so great that, could I have foreseen it this morning, it would have made the whole day happy for me in its anticipation."

"You are very kind to say so. But indeed, my lord, I do not know what I should have done, or how I should have got home, if you had not so opportunely come up, and so kindly tendered your services," said Musa earnestly. "But here we are at the 'Poplars,' Lord Cressy," she added, as they came up along the side of a low stone-wall, with a hedge growing up from the inside, above it.

When they reached the gate they found it standing wide open, and a man, with a lantern in his hand, waiting there, apparently on the watch.

"Is that Miss Percie?" inquired the sentinel.

"Yes, Selim," said the young lady, recognizing the voice.

"Master sent me out to look for you, Miss. He was feared something had happened."

"Something *has* happened, Selim, but nothing very serious. Has Barnes got home?"

"No, Miss; an't he driving?"

"I should think not. Go on with the lantern, Selim, and tell your master that I am coming."

The boy Selim went on before, along a semicircular avenue, darkened by its border of evergreens, and leading through the heavily wooded grounds and up to the house.

The door was opened into the warmed and lighted hall, ready to receive them. And within the door stood the venerable form of Mr. Lyttleton Locke, waiting to welcome his ward.

"My dear Musa, I have been very anxious about you. And Selim tells me that there has been an accident," he said, as Lord Cressy alighted and handed out his companion.

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"Not a serious one, though it certainly would have been fatal to me, if this gentleman had not come to my assistance," said Musa, as she ascended the steps and entered the hall, followed by Lord Cressy.

"This gentleman?" echoed the lawyer interrogatively, as he took the hand of his ward and looked at her escort.

"Allow me to introduce him. Lord Cressy, Mr. Lyttleton Locke," said Musa.

The two gentlemen bowed.

"I am very happy to meet you, my lord, and to thank you for the vital service you have rendered my ward, Miss Percie. I know your father, the duke, by reputation, as of course the whole world knows him, as one of the most enlightened statesmen and purest politicians of the age. I am glad to see his son."

Lord Cressy bowed, and thanked the speaker on the part of his father and himself.

Mr. Locke invited him to enter the house, and led the way into the quaint wainscoted drawing-room.

And no sooner were the party seated, than the lawyer pressed the young Englishman to remain and do them the honor of dining with them—adding that dinner would be served in a few minutes.

Well, it was not in strict etiquette, but the temptation was too strong. Lord Cressy remained.

Miss Percie vanished to make some change in her dress.

While she was gone, her guardian, who had not failed, even in the few moments they had been together, to observe the intense admiration with which the young Earl regarded Musa, and who was, besides, as deeply interested in the fate of his ward as if he had been her mamma, began to say to himself:

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"Why not? He is an earl, to be sure, and the heir of a dukedom. And she is the daughter of a commoner. But, on the other hand, she herself bears an ancient name; for she is unquestionably descended from the Percys of Northumberland—I think I can even see the Hotspur spirit in her. And moreover, she is enormously wealthy, a circumstance not to be despised even by an earl. And if she must and will marry, it is infinitely better that she should marry in some foreign country, where her family tragedy is unknown, than in her native land, where it is sure to be remembered against her. Since she won't be a nun, we must try to make her a countess. Though she may abhor the convent, she may not object to a coronet. I must look after this love-sick boy, and as the girl has no mamma to manœuvre for her, I must turn myself into a match-making old woman for her sake."

While these thoughts were passing through the mind of the old lawyer, he was making himself very agreeable to the young Earl.

"Now that we are alone for a few moments, my lord," he said, "I should feel very much obliged if you would tell me about that accident, which I cannot regret, since it has given me the pleasure of your acquaintance, and of your services, for which I have so much to thank you."

Thus invited, the young Earl related the adventure, and in doing so remembered his brother's more dangerous share in the rescue, and gave him full credit.

"And the scoundrelly coachman jumped off and left her to her fate! He shall be discharged at once, even if he has not already discharged himself; for I fancy he will be ashamed to came back and show his face here again. You have saved a very precious life, Lord Cressy. For besides her value to the few personal friends who know her, she is

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the last of her race—in this country," gravely remarked the lawyer.

"'The last of her race?'" echoed Lord Cressy.

"In this country; yes, my lord. She is descended remotely from the Percys of Northumberland. Her branch of the ancient family has been in this country, however, for more than two hundred years. Her ancestor, Harold Cuthbert Percy, was among the earliest landed proprietors in the province of Virginia. The original grant of the land, sealed with the royal seal of James the First, is still extant."

"These items of family history are very interesting to me. They make me feel that in crossing the ocean to come to this country, I am but coming among my own kindred," said the young Earl, with as much sincerity as courtesy.

Before the lawyer could reply, the door was opened and Musa Percie entered, looking very beautiful and stately in her rich dress of black velvet, with point lace collar, sleeves and handkerchief, white kid gloves and diamond jewelry. One large solitaire sparkled like a star in the darkness of her hair.

Both gentlemen arose on her entrance. And Mr. Locke handed her to a chair.

Dinner was almost immediately announced, and the lawyer arose to lead the way to the dining-room. Lord Cressy offered his arm to Miss Percie and followed.

The old lawyer was an epicure. His greatest earthly pleasure was found on his table. His dinners were therefore always exquisite to the most fastidious taste. Even the young lover, though in the presence of his beloved, was allured by the rare delicacies to a thorough enjoyment of the meal. He said to himself:

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"This old gentleman must have discovered the *ne plus ultra* of cookery, and secured the nonpareil of cooks. How the doctor would appreciate this."

And he determined to "navigate" for an invitation to dinner for the good tutor. And this he was able to do so effectually, in the course of the evening, that, when he took his leave, he, with his brother and tutor, was invited to dine with Mr. Locke on the following Monday. Lord Cressy had no difficulty in persuading his tutor and his brother to accept the invitation, and at the appointed hour the three gentlemen drove to the "Poplars," where they were cordially received by Mr. Locke and Miss Percie, and introduced to Dr. Hawes, the Rector of St. John's, who had been invited to meet them.

Dinner was soon served. And to the disgust of Lord Cressy, the Rev. Dr. Hawes led Miss Percie in.

This dinner was even better than that one of Saturday which the young Earl had praised so much. It was a perfect triumph of culinary art. During its progress, Dr. Hawes expressed a hope that their English friends might make a long visit to Washington.

Dr. Bishop replied by announcing that himself and his young friends expected to leave the city for their Southern tour the next day.

A buzz of polite opposition met this announcement.

The dinner went on. And before it was quite over, the worthy tutor was brought into such an amiable state of satisfaction with himself and all the world, that he was persuaded to admit the possibility of their remaining a few days longer in Washington.

The gentlemen did not linger over their wine, after Miss Percie had left them. They soon rejoined her in the drawing-room, where tea and coffee were served.

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When they had partaken of these refreshments, the service was removed, and card-tables were set out.

Mr. Lyttleton Locke proposed whist as a good heavy clerical game. And Dr. Bishop, Dr. Hawes, and Mr. Locke sat down to one of the tables.

"We want another. Miss Percie, will you take a hand?" inquired Dr. Hawes.

"You will please to excuse me, sir. I do not know one card from another," replied the young lady.

"Perhaps Lord Cressy will join us," suggested Dr. Hawes politely.

"Oh, don't!" exclaimed Dr. Bishop, holding up his fat hands in horror. "He is the most atrocious player. Nothing would induce me to accept him as my own partner, or recommend him as my opponent's."

Lord Cressy laughed good-humoredly, and said he was quite willing to be excused.

"Try Bertie—Lord Gilbert. He plays well, and he likes it," said Dr. Bishop.

Bertie, with a smile, advanced to the table and took the fourth place, opposite Mr. Locke. The two doctors were the other partners. And the game commenced.

Lord Cressy and Miss Percie were "left out," by no means "in the cold," however.

"Perhaps you would like to have a game of chess, Lord Cressy," she said.

"I would like very much to have one with you," he answered.

He looked around and saw the chess-board, and arose and went and brought it himself, and placed it on the table at which she sat.

"You play, I hope?" he said, as he took his seat and opened the board.

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"Very little. My guardian has been trying to teach me since I have been here, but I have not made much progress. You will gain an easy victory over me," she answered.

His eyes flashed as he looked up at her.

Love is very superstitious. He put a meaning on her words she never dreamed of, and he read a prophecy in them he never doubted. He dallied with the words and the prophecy.

"Shall I?" he asked, with beaming eyes. "Shall I, indeed, gain a victory?"

"Indeed I think you will."

"Heaven grant it!"

"Why, what a selfish being you are! and frank as selfish."

"I am very selfish in some things, and frank, I hope, in all things. And I pray for victory!" he breathed in low, ardent tones, as he gazed with adoring eyes upon her beauty.

She must have understood him, for she flushed up to the edges of her black hair. But as she was not the least bit in love with this honest boy, she soon recovered herself, and began to place her men.

"It is your first move, Lord Cressy," she said, when she had finished arranging them.

"Thanks. That is as it should be. I shall try my very best to beat you, Miss Percie, for I have unintentionally set a life-stake on this game."

"You speak in enigmas, my lord. But I shall also do my best," answered Musa good-humoredly.

Lord Cressy made his move and waited with eager eyes.

Her gaze was fixed upon the chess-board, and her beautiful hand hovered like a white dove over her chessmen for a

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full minute before she made a move. Then she looked up and smiled.

"You are a very careful player, Miss Percie," he said.

"I feel compelled to be, having so determined an antagonist," she replied.

He paused long over his next move, and finally made it with a look of anticipated triumph.

She paused longer than before.

"*Gardez!*" he said with a pleasant laugh.

"I don't understand you," she replied.

"Your queen is in danger."

"Oh!"

Her hand glided back and forth from one chessman to another some minutes, before she touched and moved one.

And thus, with long pauses between the moves, the game promised to be a protracted one.

Musa Percie was looking very grave as her fair hand hovered over the chess-board. It was her turn to move, and she did not know how to do it without disaster.

Lord Cressy watched her in delight.

"You see that I shall surely capture your queen, Miss Percie. You have scarcely a chance left," he exclaimed, in triumph.

"We shall see," she said desperately, and made her move.

He laughed gleefully and laid his hand on his king to give her a *coup de grace*, when the silver lamp that hung directly over their table fell with a crash.

Both started up from the shock, overturning the table and the chess-board, and scattering the chessmen.

"There is no great harm done," said Mr. Lyttleton Locke, coolly rising from the whist table, and picking up the silver lamp. "Not a bit of harm done; nothing bro-

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ken and nothing spilled, consequently nothing injured; only a light extinguished, and a game spoiled," he added, as he sat the table on its feet again, picked up the chess-board, and gathered the chessmen.

"Only a light extinguished, and a game spoiled," repeated Musa, with a thoughtful look.

"Only a light extinguished, and a game spoiled," echoed Lord Cressy, with a superstitious shudder.

"There, my lord, you and Miss Percie may begin anew, if you please," concluded the lawyer, as he replaced the lamp in its bracket, and returned to finish his rubber of whist.

"What ever could have caused that lamp to fall?" inquired Dr. Hawes.

"I cannot think. There seems to be nothing wrong either in the lamp or the bracket. These modern necromancers would tell us that there are spirits about," said Mr. Locke, as he took up his cards to rearrange them.

The young people did not resume their game of chess. They sat silent and inactive by the table. At length Musa smiled slightly, and inquired:

"What do you think of your victory *now*, Lord Cressy?"

He grew pale with intense earnestness, as he replied:

"A falling light prevented me from winning this game of chess; but—*fire from Heaven shall scarcely prevent me from winning the cause I have at heart!*"

"Oh, hush! hush! Such words are wild and wicked, my lord—about a silly game of chess too!" she added.

"Do you think it is only about a game of chess? Miss Percie, you *know* that it is not. You know, you *must* know the cause I have at heart——" He paused and gazed upon her with all his adoring soul in his eyes.

She could not bear the blaze of that blue fire. But she

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would not drop her own eyes under it. She threw up and averted her head.

"He is only a boy," she said to herself, "and a very impertinent one also."

"Miss Percie, have I offended you?" he inquired, in a tone of pain.

"No," she answered, "but you surprise me. You forget, Lord Cressy, that I have only known you three days."

"Only three days! Then the soul takes no account of time! In your presence I live——"

"The odd trick! and we have beaten the rubber again!" exclaimed Bertie gleefully, as he arose from the whist table and crossed to his brother's side.

"And now, my young friends, it is really time for us to go. Our good friends here have beguiled us into very late hours," said Dr. Bishop, as he moved his heavy body from his chair. "The carriage must have been waiting an hour. We must say good-night now, Mr. Locke, with many thanks for the kind attentions you have bestowed on us to-day."

"They have afforded me very great pleasure, I assure you, sir," said the polite host.

"And remember, we shall expect you to dinner, at our rooms, to-morrow evening," added the doctor, drawing on his gloves.

"Miss Percie," said Lord Cressy, in a low voice, "shall I have the pleasure of calling to see you to-morrow morning?"

"My dear Lord Cressy, don't you see that we are waiting for you?" inquired Dr. Bishop, coming up and interrupting the *tête-à-tête* before Miss Percie could make any reply.

Lord Cressy repressed an impatient gesture, bowed over Musa's hand, and joined the doctor.

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In a few minutes the party had gone.

"What do you think of the young Earl of Cressy, my dear?" inquired the lawyer, as soon as he found himself alone with his ward.

"I think him a very forward boy," replied Miss Percie.

"Boy! He is a year older than you are."

"So much the worse then. I think him a very impertinent young man."

"My dear Musa, you were brought up in a convent. You know nothing about the world."

"That is why I am so anxious to learn. My dear guardian, will you go with me to-morrow morning to look at that furnished house at the West End we were speaking of?"

"The one lately occupied by the Spanish Minister?"

"Yes."

"My dear, it is a palace."

"I want a palace."

"But the cost of that house will be enormous. The extravagant rent has prevented any one from venturing on it since the Spanish Minister left it."

"I am very glad to hear it, for now I shall be sure to get it; for I am determined to have it until I have time to build and furnish a yet more magnificent and splendid city residence."

"My dear child, such extravagance, even in one of your wealth, would be madness, especially when——"

"*Hush!*" exclaimed Musa, with that look of anguish he remembered so well darkening her forehead and convulsing her lips. "Hush! I know what you are going to say, but don't say it. I wish to forget it!" she cried, catching her breath. "If the dawn of my day of life was so dark and stormy, so much the more reason why its morning and

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noontide should be glorious and transcendent," she answered, conquering a sob with a smile.

"Heaven grant that it may be so with you, my child," said the guardian, who had begun to love his lonely ward. "Yes, I will go with you to see the house; and I will also see Mrs. Shrewsbury, and get her to call on you some day this week. Since you are so determined to live in your own house, you will require some matronly lady of unquestionable social standing to live with you, and assist you in entertaining company. Such a chaperone will be indispensable to you, who have no matronly female relative to protect you."

"Yes, I know that, my dear guardian, and I thank you for thinking about it," said Musa.

"Mrs. Shrewsbury is just the lady for the position. She is a very accomplished woman; a lady by birth and education. She was the wife of a Justice of the Supreme Court, who, being a pure politician and an incorruptible judge, left his widow and children without the means of support."

"She has children then?"

"Two: a son, who is a lieutenant of cavalry, stationed at one of our distant frontier forts; and a daughter, who is at school in the Georgetown Convent. The son pays his sister's tuition fees, and helps his mother also, out of his small lieutenant's salary. The poor lady herself lives at a second-class boarding-house, and is always in pecuniary difficulties. Such a position as you can offer her will be a great blessing to her."

"You interest me in this lady. I shall be delighted to be the means of improving her condition, at the same time that I secure to myself such a valuable chaperone," said Miss Percie, as she stooped and kissed her guardian good-night and left the room.

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The next morning, very soon after breakfast, Mr. Locke and Miss Percie went to see the elegantly furnished mansion that the heiress had set her heart on.

She liked it even better on view than she did on paper, and she desired her guardian, who was now her attorney, to make all the arrangements with the property agent who let the house, for her immediate occupancy of the premises.

When she reached home and went to her own room, she was followed by Cassy, who came with a card in her hand, saying:

"There's a gentleman down-stairs waiting for you, Miss."

"Who is he, Cassy?"

"That Early young man, Miss," said Cassy.

"That—*who?*" inquired Miss Percie, gathering her brows.

"That Early young man as was here yesserday."

"Do you mean the Earl of Cressy?"

"Yes, Miss, that's him, Early Cresses, which is a queer name for a young man, and reminds one of spring salad and sich."

With a shrug of her shoulders, Musa laid off her hat and mantle, and went to receive the Earl of Cressy.

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CHAPTER III.

ONE WINTER NIGHT.

St. Agnes' Eve—Ah! bitter chill it was!
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limped, trembling, through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold!—KEATS.

IT was a tremendous night. The sky was black as Tartarus. The wind, howling around the mountain tops, and roaring through the deep gorges, whirled avalanches of snow down into the valleys below.

In one deep, basin-like, thickly-wooded valley, stood a solitary old manor-house of great age—a huge, square, strong gray stone building, without the least pretence to architectural beauty, surrounded by many outhouses of the same massive structure, interspersed with many gigantic forest-trees, now stripped of their leaves and sheathed in ice, and the whole inclosed by a high, thick stone-wall, broken here and there by strong iron gates.

Around the manor-house and grounds stood the spectral wintry forest, clothed in snow.

Outside of that arose in a circle the mountain cliffs, also covered with snow.

Over all hung a pitch-dark sky, through which hurtled the tremendous night storm.

No one but a disembodied spirit should have been abroad on such a night; yet, through the freezing cold, blinding darkness and suffocating storm, a gigantic horseman strug-

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gled on down a defile of the mountain, and entering the valley, took his way through the spectral forest toward the manor-house.

But we must get there before him.

In one of the lower rooms of that grim, stern, prison-like dwelling, sat a lady, beautiful as Venus, and imperial as Juno.

The room itself was wide, long and lofty. The walls were covered with antique painted wall paper, representing some of the most hideous scenes of Danté's Inferno. Of course no other pictures hung upon such walls.

The four tall and narrow windows were curtained with heavy damask that had once been crimson, but had now faded into a smouldering fiery brown; the chairs and sofas around, and the threadbare carpet on the floor, were in the same half dingy, half flaming colors. Curious antique beaufets stood each side the chimney-piece.

In the fireplace hissed and spluttered a great fire of green poplar logs, that scarcely warmed the vast dreary room.

In a large tarnished crimson chair, before the fire, sat the lady already mentioned. By her side stood a small table, covered with a dusky crimson cloth, and upon the table stood a reading lamp that lighted up but a small circle in the dark scene.

But the lady.

I said that she was beautiful as Venus, and imperial as Juno, but even that scarcely does justice to the majestic loveliness of her person. She was very tall, but so finely formed and so well proportioned that, in spite of her superior height, she was perfectly graceful. Her complexion was very dark, but so deeply rich in coloring that its darkness was its greatest charm. Her hair was black as night,

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and curled in numerous rippling ringlets all around her forehead, and all over her head and down her neck.

Her magnificent form was clothed in a fine soft crimson cashmere robe, with narrow lace frills at the throat and wrists. She wore no ornaments at all, but a rich broad Indian scarf of many rainbow colors was partly wrapped around her head and shoulders, and partly permitted to flow down in a flame of beauty over her dress.

She held a book in her hand; she did not read—she listened, listened intently, but heard nothing save the howling of the wind, the hurtling of the icicles, and the occasional crash of a branch or the fall of a tree.

"What a horrible night!" she muttered to herself, as her great dark eyes dilated with terror of the solitude within and the fury without—"what an awful night! just such a one as that some eighteen years ago, when in this very room——"

Her thoughts went no further. A terrible roar and crash, and a thundering and reverberating fall, like that of a chimney overthrown, shook the house.

She started up and laid her hand upon the old moth-eaten bell-rope, but paused ere she rung, and finally dropped it and returned to her seat.

"No," she muttered, "I will call no one. These superstitious terrors are but the result of weakness, which must be overcome."

And she took her book from the table again, and attempted to read. But again she only held it open in her hand and listened, with every faculty upon the *qui vive*.

Still, as before, she heard nothing but the storm.

While she waits, I must tell you who she is, and why she sits alone in this prison-like house, in the savage mountain glen, and in this dreary old room, with its smouldering

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fire-colored furniture, and its walls papered with scenes from the "Inferno."

Katherine Carew of Raven Rocks had been Katherine Shrewsbury once. She was the daughter of an eminent physician of Richmond, long deceased, and she was the niece of that Chief-Justice Shrewsbury mentioned in our last chapter.

Beautiful exceedingly she had been from her childhood up, and beautiful exceedingly she still was, notwithstanding her forty years.

She had been educated at a first-class boarding-school, which she left at the age of eighteen, to become the mistress of her widowed father's house, and the reigning belle of the city.

Her surpassing beauty brought many suitors for her hand—her beauty alone, for it was well known that her father, who kept up a most splendid establishment in the city, was living far beyond his means, and that at his death Kate Shrewsbury would be a beggar. She herself knew that perfectly well.

When, royally arrayed in richest velvets and purest diamonds, she received her father's distinguished guests, she thoroughly understood that if she would continue to enjoy such splendors, she must hasten to make a wealthy marriage before her father's death.

No hard-hearted father or worldly-minded mother could have managed her affairs, in a worldly point of view, better than this motherless but calculating girl managed them for herself.

She closed her heart against all the allurements of manly beauty, youth and love, that sought to win her favor, and she selected the oldest and wealthiest among her suitors, Old Peter Carew, as he had been called for years before the

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time when he appeared among the suitors of the beautiful Kate Shrewsbury. He was a childless widower, and wanted a male heir for his vast estates, estates including the manor and the manor-house of Raven Rocks, just described, and great tracts, with fertile wooded valleys, glens full of water-power, and mountain ranges rich in stone quarries and iron ore, besides many outlying cultivated farms and valuable houses. The estate altogether was greater in extent and richer in resources than some German grand-duchies.

It was not difficult for Kate to lure Old Peter Carew into making a proposal of marriage. He proposed and was accepted.

Early in March the wedding came off, and a very magnificent affair it was.

Miss Shrewsbury was attended to the altar by eight bride's-maids. The cost of her diamonds, which were the gift of the bridegroom, would have purchased a valuable farm and stocked it.

Every one said, notwithstanding the disparity in their years, that they were a magnificent couple.

The bride I have elsewhere described as a tall and finely formed brunette, with splendid black eyes and luxuriant black hair.

The bridegroom was certainly a very handsome man for his age, with a tall and martial figure, a stately head, clear prominent blue eyes, and a fresh healthful face, framed in by silver gray hair and beard. He wore the conventional dress for the occasion, and carried himself with much grace and dignity.

The bridal pair went first to New York, to one of the most fashionable hotels there. And in that vast vanity fair, the happy husband loaded his young wife with costly presents.

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And then, because she wished to go, he took her to Europe, and spent the summer in travelling over that continent.

Early in September they returned, made a short visit to the old manor-house, to give Mr. Carew an opportunity of looking over his accounts with his land steward, and then, because his beautiful and idolized young wife did not like the dullness of a country life, and longed for the gayeties of the city, as well as for the society of her father, Mr. Carew left his estates still in the hands of his land steward, with instructions to let the manor-house (which was subsequently let to a certain Colonel Percie, of Bay Beauty, who had married a beautiful school-mate of Miss Shrewsbury's), and they went to Richmond, where he bought a magnificent mansion, which he furnished with great splendor.

Here he entered upon a career entirely new to him—that of a man of fashion.

Mrs. Carew became a leader of society, and her balls and parties were the great features of the fashionable season.

Mr. Carew, who never felt that he could do enough to show his gratitude for the gift of his queenly bride, paid off all his father-in-law's debts, and made him a present of a very handsome carriage and a pair of thoroughbred horses.

Mr. Carew had another cause of great joy—his young wife was likely to make him a Christmas present, which of all others would be the most acceptable to him ; but his joy was not unmixed with anxiety for the safety of the expectant mother and the unborn child.

And the only occasion upon which he tried to restrain her in her life of unbridled gayety and pleasure was when he saw that she was in danger of injuring herself.

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He tried to impress upon her mind the important fact for her, that not only his own hopes of an heir to his estates, but all her future prosperity, was staked upon that child.

His estates, he told her, were strictly entailed upon the male line of the race. That if she had a son to inherit them, her own future, even in widowhood, would be wealthy and prosperous, as the mother and guardian of the heir. But that otherwise, the portion of his property that he could devise by will was so insignificant, that it could but just secure her from actual want. Therefore he implored her to be careful.

She gayly answered that her child might, after all, prove to be a girl.

He replied that the chances were at least equal that it would be a boy, and reiterated his wish that for her own sake, if for no one else's, she would be careful.

Then she laughingly informed him that she was not in the least afraid of her future, for she felt sure that her handsome old darling would have many sons and daughters, and would live, as her father said, to be an hundred years old, by which time she herself would be an old woman.

And in this way she flattered and delighted him, and obtained her own will in all things.

But the first days of November brought a terrible calamity to her and to many others.

Mr. Carew, Dr. Shrewsbury and another gentleman had been appointed a committee to proceed to Washington City and wait upon the President, in regard to some State affairs.

They embarked on board the *Golden Shaft*, the mail steamer then plying between Richmond and Washington City.

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Many will remember the catastrophe of the *Golden Shaft*. She foundered in a storm off Point Lookout.

Several lives were lost, and among them perished Old Peter Carew and Dr. Shrewsbury.

And Kate Carew, who was within a few weeks of becoming a mother, found herself widowed and fatherless in one day.

The shock was a terrible one, and her grief was violent for a time. And she was quite alone in that grief, for her Uncle Shrewsbury was then in his last illness, so that her aunt could not leave his bedside for a day.

But in the midst of her sharpest distress she restrained herself for the sake of her unborn child.

And great was her anxiety now that the child might prove to be a boy.

It was about one week from the day of the catastrophe that she received a letter from her sometime school-mate, Musadora Summerfield, whose husband was now the lessee of Raven Rocks, and whom she had not met for more than two years.

Miss Summerfield had been her room-mate and bosom-friend during a school life of seven years. Miss Summerfield had left school full eighteen months before Miss Shrewsbury graduated. And six months later she had married Colonel Percie, of Bay Beauty. The young friends had not met since.

Now the great calamity brought them together.

Mrs. Percie wrote to her friend, saying that she grieved with her grief, and would hasten to her side at once if it were not for the state of her health, that it made impossible for her to get away from home; but imploring her dear Kate to come at once from the noise and glare of the city to the quietness and retirement of old Raven Rocks,

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where she should receive a sister's welcome and a sister's sympathy.

The young widow was glad enough to get away from the town whose amusements she could no longer share.

She wrote a warm and grateful letter to her considerate friend, and inclosed it in the very broadest black-edged envelope, and sealed it with the Carew arms—three lioncels *passant*—impressed upon broad black wax, and sent it off.

Then she shut up her house, and her father's house as well, and taking with her two faithful slaves—Agatha, or 'Gatha, who had been her foster-mother and nurse, and Pendragon, or Dragon, who had been her husband's valet from his youth up—she set out for Raven Rocks, where she was warmly welcomed by her friend and her friend's husband.

She found, to her surprise, that Mrs. Percie was preparing for her first confinement.

After making this discovery Kate Carew deemed her own visit inopportune, and would have shortened it, but lovely Dora Percie would by no means consent to that.

"Where would you go from me, dearest?" she asked. And then she added that the house was large, the servants many and well trained, and the village doctor skillful and near at hand, and if both their babies should arrive on the same day, it would only make events all the more interesting.

Kate saw that this was not mere politeness, or even mere benevolence, but that her friend's heart was set upon having her there.

And under such circumstances the young widow was only too glad to stay.

All her anxiety now was about the sex of her expected child; for if it should prove to be a girl, then she and her

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baby would be left in destitute circumstances, for they would have nothing but the small personal property of her late husband; but if it should be a boy, he would inherit the whole of the vast estates, and she, as his mother and guardian, would live in affluence.

A few weeks later two children were indeed born in that house, and on the same night; but it was a night of such utter horror and ruin, that the wonder is that either one of the mothers or babies survived. Fair Dora Percie died indeed, in the same hour that her child arrived. And Kate Carew, weak as she was through her recent trial, took charge of both children for the first few days and nursed them at her own breast.

A month later Mrs. Carew, taking with her a fair, fragile baby boy, and attended by her faithful and devoted slaves, Gatha and Dragon, left the tragic scene of Raven Rocks and returned to her elegant house in Richmond, now her own assured home for many years, in right of her guardianship of her boy.

Here she received many visits of congratulation upon the birth of her son and heir.

And here, after a year of retirement and devotion to her child, she gradually re-entered society and recommenced the career of reckless gayety that had distinguished her in her short married life.

She was visited by everybody and received everywhere, upon account of her wealth, and her brilliant balls and parties. But she was not held in very high esteem. She was considered "fast." Gentlemen talked familiarly of her over their wine, and canvassed her personal attractions as they would have criticised the "points" of a favorite racer.

One little instance, better than many words, will show the estimation in which she was held by her gentlemen

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friends. They never spoke *of* her as "Madam" or "Mrs. Carew;" but always as "Kate Carew," or even "Kate." And they continued this up to the time when her son was growing up to manhood, and she herself was getting on toward middle-age.

When we consider this boy as "the only son of his mother, and she a widow," we must acknowledge that she treated him with a strange want of affection.

He was a fair, delicate, sensitive boy, always seeming younger in body and older in mind than the number of his years warranted.

He had always shown that he felt keenly his mother's neglect of him, for from the time of her re-entrance into society, she had left him almost exclusively in the charge of his nurse, the negro woman Gatha, who, by the way, was quite worthy of that trust.

Only when the boy was ill did Kate Carew show the slightest concern about him.

Then, indeed, her anxiety was so extreme as to be in strange contrast to her previous indifference. But no one will wonder at this, when it is remembered that upon the life of that delicate boy depended the prosperity of his selfish mother.

When he was but seven years of age, she placed him in a family school, in a very healthy locality, kept by a clergyman, who advertised to receive a few young gentlemen to prepare for college.

Poor little Francis Carew, at the age of seven years, was far too young to be ready to prepare for college. But the representations, or the *mis*representations of Mrs. Carew, backed up by the tender of a handsome fee, paid in advance, induced the impoverished clergyman to receive the child.

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In this instance, the mother's indifference served the poor child's interest better than the mother's tenderest affection could have done.

The clergyman was enlightened and conscientious, and he immediately took in hand the moral, physical and intellectual training of the seven-year-old child left in his care.

And thus it followed that in another seven years, at the age of fourteen, Francis Carew, though still very delicate in appearance, was, as to his bodily condition, in perfect health; by his mental attainments prepared to enter any college; and in virtue of his moral character, he was like the illustrious owner of the new hatchet and destroyer of the cherry-tree, incapable of telling a lie!

From the clerical family school he was at once transferred to the University of Virginia, where he had remained both through term times and holiday times, up to the very night when we find this gay and fashionable mother sitting alone in the dreary room of the solitary old manor-house in the mountain-glen.

But what took this rich votary of pleasure, this fast woman of fashion, this toast of the clubs, away from the delights of society in the height of the season, and brought her down to this lonely lodge in the wilderness in the depth of winter?

It was an ill-spelled and ill-written letter from her late husband's devoted slave, and her own faithful ally, Pendragon.

Within the last two or three years, the two old people, Pendragon and Agatha, had been falling into the infirmities of age, and Mrs. Carew had sent them into retirement at Raven Rocks, which had fallen again into her hands, and where they had lived at ease and with contentment,

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until about two weeks before the time of which we now tell, when Pendragon wrote the following literary curiosity to his mistress in the city:

Raving rox Chuzedy the 27th

mi Deer mistess this go to informe You as i am oneezy into mi owne mine 'bout Gathy whitch hav got Deligion at de kamp Meatin las taugus an hav not Bin Hersselfe sense whitch she sa her Konchuntz trubbel hur an wants me to rite tow Yu an sa if i donte she mus Go to washin tunsitty an se marster Lawyur littel Towne lock. Now mi Deer mistess i donte no wot sheze upter but ime feerd she meens mischuf. So mi Deer mistess if Yule Rite an tel me wot to doo ile doo it and remanes yore onnered survant to kummand pen Draggun Crew.

This letter was put in her hands while she was dressing to go to a dinner party.

She opened the letter and looked at it curiously. She did not recognize the handwriting, so she took it at first to be one of those ordinary begging letters that she was in the habit of receiving. She could scarcely read it, for if it was ill-spelled, it was even worse written. But the signature, when at length she made it out, threw a light upon the whole letter.

She "understood a horror in the words, if not the words."

She determined to go down at once in person to Raven Rocks and see that mad woman, as in her fear and anger she called Agatha.

She stopped dressing, threw on a wrapper, and sat down and wrote an excuse to the lady and gentleman at whose house she was to have dined that day, and sent it off immediately by a private messenger.

There was a stage-coach to leave Richmond for Staunton early the next morning. Mrs. Carew sent and secured a

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single inside place for herself. And the next morning, without maid or man servant, she started alone and unattended on her journey.

It was a long day's ride to Eyrie, a mountain hamlet that was the nearest post-town to the manor of Raven Rocks. She reached Eyrie about six o'clock on a dark and cloudy winter night.

She rested at the comfortable little hotel only long enough to eat a hot supper, while the horses were being put to the only carriage the innkeeper had on hire, and then she started again for Raven Rocks, where she arrived just as the storm that had been gathering all the evening burst roaring over the earth.

The carriage and horses could not return through the storm that night. They had to be put up in the stable, and the coachman had to take up his quarters in the kitchen.

Mrs. Carew's arrival had taken her servants by surprise, and consequently nothing was ready for her reception.

She had been met and welcomed by Agatha, now a stooping and decrepit and very black old negro woman.

"Where is Pendragon?" was the first question the lady asked.

"Dragon have gone to Eyrie to de pos'-office, Miss Kate, spectin' for to get a letter from you 'n answer to hizzen, and not spectin' to see you yourself down here in pusson, which if we had, de fires should a been made, and de rooms aired, and a warm supper ready for you. I 's rale sorry to my heart, deed I is, Miss Kate," said the half-weeping old woman.

"Never mind, Agatha. I have had my supper. But I am nearly perished with cold. Where is Cornwallis?"

"De ginral have gone roun to de stables, Miss, to show

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de young man from de inn whar to put up his horses. But you come into de kitchin, honey. Dere 's a splendif fire a burnin' dere. And good laws me alive, honey, it 's better to go in de kitchen and get warm, dan to stan' here and perish to death in this freezing hall," said the woman.

"Go on, then; I will follow," answered her mistress.

And they went down the whole depth of the hall, and passed through a door on the right, leading into a long narrow passage, that in its turn led to the kitchen.

It was a large, commodious room, with a flag-stone floor and broad windows, and an immense fireplace, in which roared a huge fire of blazing hickory logs, that lighted up the place with the brilliancy of a score of gas-jets. The kitchen furniture was of the rudest and most substantial kind. A large wooden arm-chair sat in the chimney corner, and into this Kate Carew threw herself, weary and shivering.

"Miss Kate, I spose, course, you got Dragon's letter?" said Agatha.

"Yes, I got it."

"So I spected, by your bein' down here so suddint. Well, honey, I won't say nuffin to trouble your mine till you gets warmed and rested; but den I got somefin to say to you wery 'portant; 'deed I is, chile."

As she spoke, the door was pushed open, and two men entered the kitchen, followed by a furious blast of wind and snow.

One of them was a commonplace-looking mulatto boy. But the other was quite a character, both in personal appearance and in manners. He was very aged. He had been born in Revolutionary times, and the slave of a Tory master, who had named him General Cornwallis, in honor

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of the great British leader who had yielded his sword to General Washington at Yorktown.

He now advanced toward his mistress, holding his hat in his hand, and bowing.

"Mistess Carew, Madam, I habs de honor to welcome you home, Madam."

"Yes, Cornwallis. Thank you. Please make two fires for me as soon as possible—first in my bedroom, and then in the Danté Parlor," said Kate, half smiling in the midst of all her anxiety.

"Sartainly, Madam. Your odors shall be 'beyed, Madam," said the pompous old man.

An hour passed before "General Cornwallis" reappeared, bowing before his mistress and saying:

"Madam, de fires is made an' de 'partments conformable."

"Agatha, come with me," said Mrs. Carew, rising and leaving the kitchen.

The old woman only stopped to take up a kettle of warm water from the hearth, which she judged would be wanted at her mistress' toilet this bitter cold night, and then followed Mrs. Carew from the kitchen.

Kate Carew's bedroom was immediately over the Danté Parlor, and its walls were covered with picture paper representing the "Loves of the Angels." But the room from long disuse was dusty, musty, and altogether dismal-looking.

She lingered in it only long enough to change her heavy camlet cloth travelling suit for a home dress of crimson cashmere; and then, with a long Indian scarf wound about her head and shoulders, she went down to the Danté Parlor, where we found her at the beginning of the previous chapter.

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She was soon joined by Agatha, whom she had ordered to follow her.

"Sit down there. You are too old to stand," said the lady, pointing to a dusky red arm-chair opposite her own.

"Now tell me," she continued, as soon as the old woman was seated, "what took Pendragon off to Eyrie this evening?"

"He went to the pos'-office, honey, true as I telled you, to get a letter he spected from you, not specting of yourself, honey."

"I must have missed him. It is strange that I could have done so, however. You are sure he took no letter from *you* to any person in Washington City?"

"No, honey, no; for sides which, as I couldn't write myself, and Dragon, who is de onliest one on de plantation as can write, wouldn't write, I couldn't myself do nothing 'tall 'gainst your wishes dout seeing of you fust."

"And what is it that you wish to do, which you think would be against my wishes?"

"Oh, my dear chile, how can you ax me dat question? My conscience trouble me, Miss Kate, 'deed it do, honey! I didn't mind it so much when we did it, Miss Kate; but dat was years ago, when I was 'paratively a young 'oman; but I's ole now, an' soon got to pass away from dis here life. And I puts it to you, honey, kin I dare to go out of dis world, an spect to enter de kingdom of Heaben wid sich a wrong on my conscience?" the woman asked in pleading, deprecatory tones.

Then, seeing that her mistress listened but did not reply, she continued:

"'Sides, Miss Kate, *I's sure she walks.* I hears her footsteps slow and soft, jest like she used to pass about the house the month before it happened. And particular,

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honey, I hears it in de room over dis—*your* room, honey, where you 's goin' to sleep to-night.

"There 's where I hears de noises, honey, and nateral enough, for there 's where we did it."

She came to a full stop now, and looked at her mistress.

"Go on," said Kate.

"Oh, Miss Kate! Don't look so awful, honey. All your color 's gone out o' your cheeks, and your eyes is like flames of fire."

"Tell me what you wish to do. Will you?"

"Oh, Miss Kate, I wants to 'fess, indeed I do. And I mus' 'fess, to save my own poor ole soul. You see, las' Augus' I 'tended camp-meetin' an' I got deligion, and I wanted to jine de church, but I couldn't feel as my sins was forgiven me while I had dis wrong on my conscience. So I told Marse Preacher about it—— Oh, Miss Kate, what 's the matter?" cried Agatha, suddenly breaking off from her talk and rushing to her mistress, who had turned ghastly pale.

"*Sit down!*" said the lady sternly; "sit down, and go on with what you were saying. You told the parson what?"

"I tole him as how years ago I had helped to 'mit a great crime, leastways to hide it; and as how people was a suffering for it to dis day; but mind, Miss Kate, I didn't tell him what it was, nor yet where it was, nor yet who was concerned nuther, but I daren't even die till I 'bey my conscience, and 'fess de great wrong I has help to hide; and I daren't put off 'fessin' no longer, 'cause I 'm liable to die any time now."

"Do you know that in making this confession you will make yourself liable to imprisonment in the State's prison for life?" inquired the lady, in a low, hard tone, as if of repressed passion.

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"Yes, honey, I knows it good, but my life an't agoin' to be werry long; and what 's a little time in prison 'pared to 'ternity in torment? No, honey, I ain't afeard of dat. I would 'fess, Miss Kate, even if I knowed I would be killed for it, 'stead o' being put in prison."

"Then, Agatha, I have but one request to make of you: that you will defer speaking about this matter to any one for three days. Will you do that much for the foster-child you professed to love so much?"

The old woman reflected for a few moments, and then answered:

"Yes, honey, for your sake I 'll put it off for three days; but don't ask me to put it off no longer 'n dat, honey, 'cause I 'm a riskin of my eberlastin soul."

"I will not ask you to defer it longer than that. Now leave me, and as soon as ever Dragon comes from Eyrie send him up to me."

"Yes, Miss Kate; and while I 's waiting for him, I 'll 'ploy my time prayin' for you and me," moaned the old woman, rising by the help of her staff, and tottering from the room.

When the door had closed behind Gatha, Kate Carew started suddenly with the bound of a wild beast to her feet, and began to pace the floor with hurried strides.

The howling of the storm without seemed a fit accompaniment to the tumult of her own soul.

At length she threw herself down on her chair with a heavy thud, and covered her face with her hands.

"It is of no use to agonize myself over this crisis. I must grapple with it," she muttered to herself. "The alternative is this: RUIN OR ANOTHER CRIME. And since this is so, my own course is clear."

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CHAPTER IV.

ALARMING NEWS.

THERE was a rap at the door.

Kate Carew started, listened for a moment, and then bade the rapper to come in.

And the door was opened, and the negro Pendragon entered the room.

He looked like an impersonation of the storm.

He was a tall, huge, very black negro, in very heavy clothing, covered now with frozen snow as with a coat of armor, which rattled as he walked to the middle of the room, where he stood still.

"Come here, Pendragon," said his mistress.

"I should give yer yer death o' cold if I was to come any nigher, Mistess."

"Nonsense. I am not at all delicate. But why did you go out such a terrible night?"

"Why, you see, Mistess, not 'specting of the joy to see you yerself here, Mistess, I went up to Eyrie, hopes of getting a letter from you, Mistess. O' course I didn't get no letter *from* you; but to my 'streme s'prise, I found a letter waiting there *for* you, which there hasn't been no letter come to that post-office for you, Mistess, for years and years!"

"A letter for me from the Eyrie post-office!" exclaimed Kate Carew in alarm; for every unusual circumstance alarmed her in the present crisis of her fate.

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"Yes, Mistess, and here it is," said Pendragon, as he came softly across the room, walking on tiptoe for fear of rattling his icicles down upon the carpet, and laid the letter on the stand before his mistress.

She snatched up the letter and began to look at it.

"And now, Mistess, if you 'll scuse me, I 'll go away while you 's a reading of it, and put on some dry clothes, and then come back here and wait yer commands immediate."

"Very well; go."

Pendragon bowed, and turned and tripped out of the room as cautiously as he had tripped into it, rattling his icy armor, however, as he retired.

Kate Carew examined her letter.

It was directed to Mrs. Katherine Carew of Raven Rocks, Eyrie, Rockbridge county, Virginia.

She recognized the handwriting, and smiled sarcastically as she turned to the signature and read it.

"I thought so," she said. "It is from my Aunt Shrewsbury, the poor proud widow of the Chief-Justice. It is a begging letter, of course, like the many I received in Richmond within the last year, and not one of which I answered. And I do suppose the poor woman thinks the reason she never got a reply to any of her begging letters is that I never received them, and that I was absent from the city and living in retirement here in my country house. Come, let's see what the old lady wants now."

She turned to the first page, and read:

WASHINGTON CITY, January 20th, 18—.

MY DEAREST NIECE: As I have written several letters addressed to you in Richmond, and have failed to get any reply to either of them, I have come to the conclusion that you must have retired to

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your country seat. I shall therefore address this letter to Raven Rocks.

I write to inform you of a piece of good fortune that has befallen me. You may remember Mr. Lyttleton Locke, of the eminent firm of Locke & Keyes, attorneys-at-law. Well, the senior partner, Mr. Locke, was a great friend of my late husband, the Chief-Justice, and has continued to be a great friend to his bereaved widow and orphans.

Mr. Locke has a ward. She is a fatherless and motherless girl, who is the heiress of an enormous fortune. She has just come out of the convent school, where she has passed the whole of her life since she was seven years old, and has just entered upon the inheritance of her fortune.

"Good Heaven! if it should be——" ejaculated Kate Carew; and without finishing her sentence, she hastily went on reading.

Now, Mr. Locke being a bachelor, without any lady at the head of his establishment, cannot offer his late ward a proper home in his own house, even if she were willing to accept such a one, as she is not. Her guardian has therefore taken for her a very magnificent mansion, splendidly furnished. It was, in fact, the residence of the late Spanish Minister.

"That princely mansion! She is ambitious, this young heiress! but if she is who I suspect her to be, she comes honestly enough by her ambition. But let us see. Will the old woman never tell us who she is?"

But as Miss Percie—Musa Percie—that is her name——

"Gracious Heaven! it *is* the same!" exclaimed Mrs. Carew, eagerly reading on.

As Miss Percie, being a very young unmarried lady, cannot properly keep house without a chaperon, Mr. Locke has had the goodness to remember me, and introduce me to the heiress as an eligible party to fill the place of a mother to her.

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I am at the head of an establishment of almost regal magnificence, splendor and luxury. I receive the very best, and only the very best society in the city; for, in the social interests of my protégé, I feel bound to be extremely exclusive. And I can assure you that our house is considered the *most* exclusive in the city. All the invitations are sent in my name. And this is done at the especial desire of Miss Percie, who has certainly a very delicate sense of propriety in *some* matters, though not in *all*, I am sorry to add.

"She would not be her mother's daughter if she had," commented Kate, with a scornful laugh.

So the cards sent out in the name of Mrs. Chief-Justice Shrewsbury draw crowds of the most distinguished people in the city.

But I must tell you what my darling girl, as I call Musa Percie, is like. Well, she is like *you*. You may not believe me; you may think it only my own fancy; but she *is*.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Kate. Then she went on reading.

She is a tall, splendid brunette with a very dark and very rich glowing complexion, with superb black hair and eyes. She dresses more like an Eastern princess than like a European or American woman. I mean, of course, only as to the magnificence and splendor of her costumes, for, of course again, she dresses in the fashion of the present age and country. She is highly accomplished, sings and plays like a prima donna, when she condescends to do either, and speaks all the modern languages like the cultivated citizens of their respective countries. At least so they say; I don't know. Girls were not educated up to that in my day. And neither was I. But I hear her, at our receptions, chattering away to the foreign ministers in their own tongues as glibly as if she were one of themselves. Miss Percie has many admirers among the best people here. But the chief of them is the young Earl of Cressy, son of the Duke of Montcalla. He is at present the guest of the British Minister, and is a daily morning visitor at our house, and a constant attendant at our receptions. I think my darling girl decidedly favors him, and I may live to see her a duchess yet.

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We have now been housekeeping for six weeks. In this time we have given two large parties, and held weekly card receptions every Wednesday afternoon. And we have accepted invitations, and attended several dinner and evening parties. But you will perhaps wonder why I write at such length to tell you all this.

Well, I will tell you. My darling girl not only gives me the privilege of inviting whomsoever I please to come and stay at the house, but she even urges me to do so. She is very fond of company, and also very fond of patronage. She has entreated me to have my son and daughter home here with me this winter. The Captain, you know, is away off at Fort Ute, on the banks of the Yellowstone River. But the dear child is going to use her influence with the Secretary of War to get him home on a three months' leave, for my sake. And really that old cabinet minister worships her to that extent, that he seems to think the sun and moon rises and sets with her. And she will have my boy home, if she sets her mind on it. Of course she has never seen him. And she acts from disinterested kindness to me. But Richard is certainly *very* handsome, and when she does see him, who knows what may happen? However, that is looking too far ahead. Clarice is at school, where I have hitherto kept her, because it is the cheapest and safest place I could keep her at. But at the end of her present term, which unfortunately I had paid in advance, I shall bring her home here, where she will have the advantages of the best society. She is considered very beautiful, and may make a good marriage—who knows? But you are wondering what all this has to do with you.

"Yes, I should think I was," put in Kate Carew. "And now," she said, as she turned another page of the voluminous manuscript, "let us see what it *has* to do with me."

I will tell you. You must come to Washington, and come to us to spend the winter, or rather, the remainder of the winter, for this is the twentieth of January, and the winter is half gone. But February, as you know, is the gayest month of all the season, "the maddest, merriest" month of the whole year in this city—the carnival of Washington before Lent. Come, therefore, to us at once. My darling girl not only authorizes this invitation, but also joins me in it,

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and begs me to assure you that, as the relative of her dear friend, you shall be most warmly welcomed to her house. I think you will find it very pleasant. Therefore I say to you again, Come.

Your affectionate aunt,

SUSANNAH SHREWSBURY.

Kate Carew folded this letter, and holding it on her lap, fell into deep thought that lasted several moments.

"They must marry," she said at length, speaking very slowly. "They must marry. Then 'if the worse should come to the worst' *they* will be saved. Yes, Aunt Shrewsbury, I will accept your invitation. You are very shrewd, Aunt Shrewsbury, to bring around your protégé, as *you* call her—your benefactress, as *I* call her—all the distinguished people you can. It will make her think all the more highly of your connection. And extremely shrewd you are to bring that tall military son of yours from his frontier fort to try his chance with the heiress. But you are not so shrewd when you invite *me* there. I have a handsome son too. And a deeper stake in his marriage with that heiress than 'your philosophy has ever dreamed of.' Yes, Aunt Shrewsbury, I will come. And somebody else will come also," said Kate Carew to herself, as she sat ruminating over all she had learned from the letter of the Chief-Justice's widow, until there came a second rap at the door.

"Come in, Pendragon," she said, knowing at once who was there.

The huge negro entered, now neatly clothed in his best Sunday suit, to wait upon his mistress.

"First of all, Dragon, go and see if you can find in this dreadful old prison any pens, ink and paper. I have two letters to write to-night, which I wish you to mail for me to-morrow morning. Can you get me the writing materials?"

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"Yes, Mistess; der 's some in Mr. Bullock's room."

Mr. Bullock was the land steward.

"In Mr. Bullock's room! Pray, does Mr. Bullock own a room here?"

"Yes, Miss—no, Miss; least ways, when he come here wunst a mont to make out the counts, he do make use of that little office right-hand side of the back door where Marse Peter Carew used to keep his books, cause the writin' desk and arm-chair is a standing there yet."

"Oh, very well. Go and get what I want."

The man hurried away, and soon brought the writing materials and laid them on the table before his mistress.

"Stand there now, Pendragon, and wait until I get through with my writing," she said, as she addressed herself to her task.

Her first letter was to Mrs. Shrewsbury, thanking Miss Percie and herself for their kind invitation, and frankly expressing the pleasure she felt in accepting it.

Her second letter was to her long neglected son, and in it she assumed a most affectionate tone that must have greatly surprised him. She begged him to withdraw from his studies for a while and join her in Washington City, whither she was going to spend the month of February. She further desired him to answer her letter immediately, and to direct his answer to Washington.

Having sealed up both her letters, she gave them to her servant with orders to take them to the Eyrie post-office very early in the morning, to be in time for the first mail.

Pendragon put them both carefully in the breast pocket of his coat, and stood waiting for further orders.

Mrs. Carew put away her writing materials in the little drawer of her table, and then, with her handsome head

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bowed down upon her hand, she remained for a few moments in silent thought.

It must be a most miserable degradation for man or woman with the slightest sense of honor or delicacy to remember that they have taken into their deepest confidence an inferior creature, and by that act not only humbled themselves, but reduced the poor brute to their own low moral standard.

The ignorant black giant, now standing before his beautiful mistress, loving her with the blind unselfish devotion of a dog, ready to lose his life or ruin his soul at her bidding, had been her confederate in a felony long years before. She had committed the crime under an almost overwhelming force of circumstances that seemed to take the form of destiny. And he and Agatha had helped her. And she hated him because he knew of her crime, and because she was so far in his power.

In his power! Poor brute! she was safe enough in his power. He had but one religion: his slavish devotion to her. He would have given his body to be burned at the stake, rather than she should have been hurt.

Now he stood before her knowing that she was in great fear and perplexity, and ready, as ever, to give himself, body and soul, to her deliverance.

"You must be tired after your long ride through the storm, Dragon. Don't stand. I have a great deal to say to you. Sit down while I say it. But go fasten both the doors first."

The negro went and secured the door leading into the hall, and the other one communicating with the dining-room, and then he seated himself at a respectful distance from his mistress.

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"Can you hear me there when I speak as low as I must?" she inquired.

"Yes, Mistess."

"Tell me, then, how many of the servants sleep in this house?"

"General Cornwallis, Gatha and me, and the young man from the inn sleep here to-night."

"But he will be away to-morrow morning."

"Yes, Mistess."

"Cornwallis cannot be trusted."

"No, Mistess, not for nothing *onusual*, he can't."

"Then I shall take him away to-morrow when I go."

"Yes, Mistess."

"And then no one will be left in the house but you and Agatha."

"No, Mistess."

"Agatha is very old, and she cannot have long to live."

"No, Mistess."

"Yet short as her life may be, it will be long enough for her to ruin mine."

"Oh, my Mistess, she must never be let to do that. She must be 'vented of doing that, at any rate."

"Yes, and we must settle that to-night. This horrid night of storms will aid us at least. Neither struggles nor cries could be heard through the roaring of the storm to-night. Pendragon, I know that I can depend on you," she said, looking straight in the negro's eyes.

"Mistess! I would heave myself into a mill and be ground up for your sake," said the poor brute.

There was silence between them for a few moments, and then Mrs. Carew inquired:

"In what part of the house do the servants sleep now, Pendragon?"

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"In the room over the kitchen and scullery, Mistess, which I and General Cornwallis sleep over the kitchen, and Agatha, she sleep over the scullery by herself. The young man from the inn, he sleep in the room with me and the General."

"All these rooms are in the back building projecting from the south-western corner of the house," said Mrs. Carew reflectively.

"Yes, Mistess, all of 'em is in the back building."

"I suppose Agatha has gone to bed?"

"Yes, Mistess, dey 's all gone to bed. Gatha only stayed up till I come home to tell me as you had 'rived and 'sired to see me; and then she went up to bed herself."

"Very well then. I am going up to my room now. It is over this one. Do you fasten up the house, and put out the lights. Then go to Agatha's room and wake her up softly and silently as possible. Whisper to her that I want her in my room, and that she must come directly with you. Fasten up every door after you, as you pass it. Then bring her to me."

"Yes, Mistess."

"You understand every part of my instructions now?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, Mistess."

"Very well. Be quick; but—be cautious," said Kate Carew, as she took up a small hand-lamp and passed out into the hall and up-stairs to her chamber.

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CHAPTER V.

A MISSING WOMAN.

It was late the next morning when Kate Carew awakened from a disturbed and restless sleep.

With a groan of anguish, she covered her face with her hands, as if to shut out the light of day.

"Oh, devil! devil!" she muttered to herself, "how the first crime twists itself into a scourge of fiery serpents to whip the criminal on to others! But it is fate. Who can withstand fate? And why should I fret against it? Poverty and illness are the only real evils, and I am rich and in good health. Why need I care? Come, I will be happy."

With these words, she got up and threw on a warm wadded dressing-gown, thrust her feet into warm furred slippers, and went and threw herself into a large old arm-chair before the fire.

The fire of great green cedar logs was still smouldering dully, as it had smouldered all night. But there was a box of lighter kindling wood on the hearth.

She took some of this and threw it upon the dull fire, which soon burst into a bright blaze.

Then she pulled the rusty, moth-eaten bell-rope which hung at the right of the chimney. It moved with difficulty, and then broke in her hand.

"There, I doubt if anybody heard that. And even if they did, I doubt if anybody will answer it," she said, with

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a grating laugh, as she threw the broken end of the bell-rope on the floor and sank back in her seat.

In a few minutes more, somebody knocked at the door. She said, "Come in."

And the pompous form of old Cornwallis entered the room, bowing his white woolly head with every step.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Carew, Madam, but there was no one to answer the bell but me, Madam," he said, stopping and standing still, at a respectful distance.

"Why, how was that?" inquired Mrs. Carew, with a look of surprise. "Why didn't Agatha answer it?"

"Beg your pardon, Madam; but it is the strangest thing I ever see."

"What is?" sharply inquired Kate Carew.

"Agatha can't be found, high nor low, anywhere about the house or grounds, Madam."

"What?" curtly demanded the lady.

"It is jes' so as I telled you, Madam. She can't be found. She an't been seen this morning. We all come in out o' the stable after feedin' the creeturs, and spected to find our breakfas' ready for us. But there was no breakfas' and no Gatha. Sich a thing never happened before. So Pendragon and the young man from the inn being in a hurry to get to Eyrie, jes' eat some cole pork and hominy and started off. And then I went up to Gatha's door, thinking as she had oversleeped herself, and I meant to a knocked when I got there, but the door was wide open, and the bed tumbled, and there wa'n't nobody in the bed, nor likewise in the room. And, Madam, I did not think much of that, for I said to myself that she had got up and dressed herself, and gone down to get breakfas' *at last.* And, Mistess, I went back to the kitchen myself. But she

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wa'n't there. And, Madam, as it has turned out, she wa'n't nowhere."

"You don't mean to tell me that the woman is really missing?" inquired Kate Carew, with a look of astonishment.

"I raly do, Madam. I have looked for her everywhere down-stairs, and called her, and can't find her nowheres."

"Oh, she has probably gone out to see some friend," said Kate Carew carelessly.

"Beg pardon, Madam, but there an't a living soul in all the valley, 'cept me; an' I live in de house. And she never could go over the mountain wall in sich weather as this. 'Sides which, Madam, if that had been the case, I should a been able to track her by her footprints in the snow. But there an't no footprints; so she couldn't a gone out. She an't in the house, and she an't out'n the house, and 'clars to the law, Mistess, it 's the most 'sterious thing I ever knowed in my life. She can't be dead nyther, 'cause we'd a found her body," added the old man. And then, with a strange coincidence, he stooped down and touched a dark, thick, slimy spot on the floor at his feet, and rising up again, looked attentively at the stained tip of his finger.

Kate Carew shuddered as she saw the act, and watched him with haggard anxiety.

"It 's blackberry jelly," he said, as he drew a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his finger—"blackberry jelly. Couldn't think what in the name o' sense it was. And dunno how on the face of the yearth it could a got there. And that 'oman Gatha not to 'tend to it! The house wa'n't fit for you to come in, Mistess, 'deed it wa'n't. I 'm mortified to think as you should a come inter sich an unbefittin' place. If I 'd only a knowed you had been coming, I 'd a had things all right."

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"Never mind the blackberry jelly, Cornwallis. I dropped that there myself when I was taking a little that I carry in my travelling bag for a slight cold that I have got," said Kate Carew, with a sigh of relief.

"Yes, 'm; and a proper good thing for a cold, too. Well, Madam, seeing no one else was on hand to cook, I got you the best breakfas' I knowed how to get—coffee and muffins and br'iled ham and chicken, Madam; and fresh eggs ready to drap in the egg boiler, the minute you are ready for them."

"Thanks, Cornwallis. I shall breakfast in about twenty minutes. You need feel no anxiety about Agatha. Of course she will turn up all right before long."

"I spect of course she will, ma'am. And it isn't as I 'm so anxious, only it is so 'sterious."

"That will do. You can go now and have breakfast on the table in twenty minutes."

The solemn old fellow bowed his white head with great deference and withdrew.

As he left the room, the handkerchief with which he had wiped his stained finger slipped to the ground unnoticed by him.

As soon as the door closed, Kate Carew sprang forward and turned the key. Then she seized the handkerchief and dipped it in water, and stooped down and washed up the dark stain from the floor.

"A little water clears us from this deed," she said, as she finished the job.

Then taking the stained handkerchief, she threw it into the hottest midst of the fire, where it was quickly dried and consumed to tinder.

Then she washed and dressed herself, wrapped a heavy India shawl about her, and went shivering and shuddering

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down through the cold halls and passages to the Danté parlor, where a glorious fire of cedar logs was burning in the broad fireplace, near which a small breakfast table was neatly set for one.

She drew the arm-chair close up to the fire and hovered over it, still trembling with cold.

"The coffee will warm me," she said at length, as she arose and rang the bell.

Her summons was soon answered by Cornwallis with the breakfast tray.

He arranged the edibles neatly on the table, and then stood waiting.

Kate Carew merely wheeled her chair around, for she sat between the fire and the breakfast table.

After she had taken one cup of coffee, she turned to her attendant and said:

"I wish you to be ready, Cornwallis, to go with me to Richmond. We leave here about two o'clock this afternoon, in order to reach Eyrie in time to take the night coach to the city. Pendragon will drive me over in the carriage. You will sit on the box beside him. Therefore you must prepare yourself by wrapping up very warmly."

"Yes, Madam," answered the old man, bowing deferentially. He waited in deferential silence until Mrs. Carew had finished her breakfast, and then, at a sign from her, he removed the service.

When he had left the room, Kate Carew, warmer now, arose and walked about the room, in impatient idleness, while waiting for the arrival of her messenger from the post-office. Soon there came a knock at the door, followed by the entrance of Pendragon, who bowed, advanced, and reported:

"Got there in time, Mistess, and posted both letters,

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and secured two places, one inside and one outside of the night coach for Richmond."

"I am glad to hear that. Go now and get your breakfast, and get everything in readiness for our departure this afternoon," replied Mrs. Carew.

The man bowed and withdrew.

Kate Carew wandered listlessly about the room for a few moments, and then went up to her own bedroom and began to pack her portmanteau for the journey.

At one o'clock old Cornwallis placed a substantial luncheon on the table.

At two o'clock the old family carriage, brushed out and brightened up for the occasion, was brought round. And Mrs. Carew, attended by old Cornwallis, and driven by Pendragon, set out on her journey through the wintry forest and over the snow-covered mountains, toward Eyrie.

The short January day was drawing to a close when they drove into the village.

The stage-coach had already arrived from Staunton, and was standing before the Raven Inn to change horses and give the passengers time to eat supper, before resuming the journey for the night toward Richmond.

On alighting from her carriage, Mrs. Carew entered the inn and went into the parlor for a few moments, calling Pendragon to attend her, and leaving Cornwallis with the horses.

The parlor was empty, the temporary guests of the "Raven" being then either at the supper table or in the bar-room.

She sat down by the fire, and beckoned her devoted slave to come close to her.

He approached, and stood deferentially before her.

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"Pendragon, you will be alone in that great house."

"Yes, Mistess."

"Shall you be afraid?"

"No, Mistess."

"You can have what company you please in the kitchen, and you may feed them and yourself on the best of everything the manor yields; but you must never let them or any one else enter the main building of the house, or even enter the long passage that connects the kitchen with it."

"No, Mistess, for I shall nail up the door leading from the kitchen into that passage."

"Very right. And as a last warning to you, Pendragon, I must remind you to be very, very cautious."

"I will be so, Mistess."

"Remember that my fortune, reputation, liberty, and even my life, may depend upon your caution."

"*You* may depend upon *me*, Mistess."

"And the reason I take Cornwallis to the city with me is to remove a spy from your path."

"Yes, Mistess, I understand that perfect," answered Pendragon.

But it was a great oversight, if Mrs. Carew had but known it, for her to have left old Cornwallis standing out there with the horses.

While the old man, muffled up with woolen comforters, and wrapped in an overcoat with many capes, walked up and down on the snow-covered sidewalk, clapping his fur-gloved hands to keep them warm, he was suddenly accosted by a gentleman who was also well defended from the weather by a heavy black overcoat and a voluminous white woolen choker.

"You live at Raven Rocks, I believe, my colored brother."

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Old Cornwallis drew himself up, raised his hat, and answered pompously:

"I hab that honor, sir; though at present on my way to the city, in 'tendance on my Mistess."

"Your Mistress, Mrs. Carew, has been down at Raven Rocks then?"

"Yes, sir; a flying visit; mos' onexpected on our part, sir, and mos' sudden and short on the Madam's, sir," answered Cornwallis, who would certainly never have been so communicative to a stranger, had he not recognized in him the itinerant preacher who had been holding prayer-meetings in the neighborhood for some weeks past.

"I hope that your fellow-servant's, my good colored sister's, mind is a little easier than when I saw her last," said the preacher.

"You mean Gatha's, sir?" inquired the old man, in some perplexity.

"Yes; I hope her mind is easier."

"Oh, Marster, I don't know. She's missing, sir. She disappeared from the house some time late last night, or airly this morning, and no one knows when she went, or where she went, or anything at all about her, and no one can find her, nor any sign of her, high nor low. And what makes it more 'sterious still, sir, the old 'oman was very feeble, sir, and very 'fraid of hurting herself, or getting cold and dying, sir, so she never stirred outside of the house in sich weather as this," said Cornwallis, all his fears for the fate of his fellow-servant reviving as he spoke of her disappearance.

And as he thus spoke the preacher looked and listened, first with surprise, and then with a deepening interest, and finally with suspicion.

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"When was she seen last?" he inquired, bending his eyes on the old man.

"Well, sir, the last time as she was seen was when she lit her bit of candle in the little brass candlestick, sir, and went up the kitchen stairs to go to bed. Me and Mr. Pendragon, and William from the inn here, sir, all seed her then, and we an't none of us seed her since. When I went up to look for her this morning, sir, thinking as she had oversleeped herself, I found her door wide open, and her bed tumbled up, and her room empty. She wa'n't there, sir; no, nor she wa'n't nowhere, sir."

"When did your mistress reach Raven Rocks?"

"Last night, sir."

"And when does she return to town?"

"To-night, sir, in that same stage-coach as is standing there now, sir."

"And she takes you with her?"

"She does me that honor, sir."

"And who remains in charge of the old house?"

"Mr. Pendragon, sir, and Mrs. Agatha, when she 's found."

"Yes, when she 's found," thoughtfully repeated the preacher.

At that moment the stage coachman mounted his box, lighted two lamps, one on each side of him, and then blew a long blast on his horn, to warn all whom it might concern that the coach was about to start on its long winter night's journey.

The passengers came trooping out of the inn. Foremost among them came Mrs. Carew, well wrapped in her shawls and furs.

She happened to be the only lady passenger on this bit-

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ter night, and she was accommodated with the warmest corner of the back seat.

Her devoted slave Pendragon saw her seated, handed her her little travelling bag, and then touched his hat respectfully and withdrew.

Old Cornwallis bowed good-night to the travelling preacher, and climbed with difficulty up to his cold seat on the top of the coach.

Pendragon waited, hat in hand, to see the coach off, and then he went and got upon the box of the empty Raven Rocks carriage, and turned his horses' heads homeward.

It was now night, and would have been dark but that a very bright full moon shining from a clear star-spangled sky, over the pure white, snow-covered earth, made it, as the children say, almost as light as day.

The travelling preacher stood by his own horse, hesitating thoughtfully for a few moments.

Then seeming to come to a sudden resolution, he threw himself into his saddle and cantered off in the wake of the lumbering old Raven Rocks carriage.

He soon overtook it, and had to abate his own speed unless he wished to pass it and leave it far behind. This he did not want to do, though he fretted against the delay.

He trailed Pendragon home to Raven Rocks, forced himself upon the negro's hospitality, stayed all night in the deserted mansion (sleeping on a shake-down before the kitchen fire), and learned enough to satisfy himself that Agatha had been foully dealt with by Mrs. Carew to conceal the crime which the conscience-smitten old negress had determined to confess.

Having become satisfied on this point, the Rev. Mr. Wilks (for that was the preacher's name) started early in the

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morning for Pirate's Peak, a long point of land stretching out from the western shore of Maryland into Chesapeake Bay.

Pirate's Peak, or "Carew's Cape," as it was called by the owners of the plantation that covered it and stretched a long way inland, was the residence of Harold Carew, commonly called "The Old Harry" by his neighbors.

Harold Carew was now about sixty years of age. In person he was of medium height, bullet-headed, bull-necked, broad-shouldered, and deep-chested. His features were large, and his face was ruddy, and framed in by the red beard that adorned his chin, and the red hair that covered his big round head.

In disposition and character he was honest, truthful, affectionate and benevolent, but also proud, fierce, fearless and reckless.

He was capable of the most magnanimous self-sacrifices, and also of the most cruel and vindictive tyranny.

He had been twice married. He had broken the heart of his first wife, and driven their only son into banishment.

He was now living with his second mate, a tall, graceful, stately lady, somewhat past her prime, an excellent wife, mother, and housekeeper, and who so thoroughly believed in and bowed down to her dangerous husband, as to make it impossible for him to break the heart or the spirit that was ever so willing to bend, and so elastic under the pressure.

They had but one child, a beautiful little daughter, called Espirita, and variously pet-named "Rita," "Sprite," and even "Mite."

She was the spoiled child of the house, "the power behind the throne greater than the throne," the master of

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the master, the mistress of the mistress, the tyrant of the tyrant. And yet she was but a sunbeam to look at—a small, slight, fragile creature, fair-skinned, blue-eyed, golden-haired, light and sparkling as a diamond, giddy as a gad-fly.

She could not remember her banished half-brother, who had been driven away from home while she herself was still a babe in long clothes, but she loved him with an ideal and romantic affection. And she was accustomed to say:

"The people all tell me that I shall be an heiress, papa, but *I* tell *you* that you may leave your whole estate to me if you like, and the first thing I shall do after I come into possession will be to spend all the money in advertising for my brother Harry until I have found him. And the next thing will be to give him all the land!"

The effect of this oft-repeated declaration was, that Harold Carew came to believe in it, and so he made a will tying up his estate so tightly that his little heiress Espirita would not be able to alienate it.

Pirate's Peak was a very lonely place even in summer, where frequently the little coasting traders came to anchor to the north or south of the Peak, and their skippers landed to have a talk with the Colonel, as they called Harold Carew, only because he had once commanded a regiment of militia.

But in winter, when the navigation was closed, it was, in the words of Sprite, "*awful lonesome.*"

Their neighbors were few and far between, and the country roads were unfavorable to visiting.

No post town or even village was within many miles of them. No letters or newspapers ever came to the Peak, nor any books except an occasional one borrowed or purchased by Mrs. Harold Carew.

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At this season, Colonel Carew had one eccentric habit. He used every morning to send a negro boy named Sim out to a certain stile, where the public road ran through one of his stubble fields.

On this stile the boy was accustomed to sit perched all day long, whistling the tune of a corn song to keep up his spirits, and whittling a stick to fill up his time, while, according to his master's orders, he kept a sharp look-out for passers-by.

On the approach of a gentleman on horseback, or in a carriage, a conversation something like this would ensue:

"Mornin', Marster. Is yer a travellin', or is yer a gwine anywheres?" the boy would ask, respectfully pulling his wool.

"I am travelling, boy. Why?"

"If yer 's travellin', Marster, why, Marse Colonel Carew he say how he be glad you stop at his house and have supper and stay all night, and take breakfas' afore yer goes furder."

"Where does your master live?"

"Little ways off f'om here, sar. I show yer."

And the boy would put his knife in his pocket, throw away his whittled stick, and jump down from the stile, apparently glad that his vigil was over.

It was in this way that the Rev. Mr. Wilks was accosted one afternoon and guided to the threshold of the Carew mansion.

The preacher dismounted before the door, and gave his horse in charge of Sim to be led to the stable, while he himself went up the steps and knocked.

Small ceremony was used at Pirate's Peak.

Colonel Carew, walking about his hall as restlessly as an old lion in his cage, came and opened the door himself.

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"Mr. Wilks! Why, how do you do, sir? How do you do? I am *de*lighted to see you! Come in, sir! come in!" exclaimed the Colonel, the moment he recognized his visitor, grasping him by the hand and drawing him into the hall.

"My wife will be charmed to see you, sir. Wife! Mrs. Carew! Here is the Rev. Mr. Wilks, whom we used to know in Washington," continued the Colonel, pushing open the door on the left of the hall and ushering the visitor into the parlor, where his gentle wife and wild little daughter sat together.

Mrs. Carew arose and received the visitor with genuine cordiality, and little Sprite made him welcome by drawing up the most comfortable arm-chair for his use, and taking his broad-brimmed hat from his hand.

A fine supper was set before the travelling preacher. He ate but sparingly, however.

When supper was over, and when the party had returned to the parlor, he said to Colonel Carew:

"I have some very important intelligence to communicate to you, sir. I came down to this neighborhood for the sole object of communicating it. And now I beg that you will give me an hour's interview with you."

"Alone?"

"Alone, if you please."

Mrs. Carew and her daughter immediately arose to withdraw.

"No; don't go, wife. Sit still, both of you. I will take Mr. Wilks to my study, where there 's a fire," said the Colonel, rising and leading the way to a small well-warmed and well-lighted room at the end of the hall.

On entering the "study," Old Harry gave the seat of honor and authority to his clerical guest, and he himself

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took the only other seat in the small room, the high stool usually occupied by the land steward, the debtor, servant, or some other culprit.

"Now then I am at your commands, Reverend Sir," said Colonel Carew.

"I am at yours rather," replied the preacher courteously, bowing.

"What is it then? Proceed, sir; I am all attention."

The preacher plunged immediately into the midst of his subject.

"I think, Mr. Carew, that you were once considered the heir presumptive of the great Raven Rock estate held by the elder branch of the Carew family in Virginia?"

"Yes, sir, for over forty years I was so considered, for the proprietor of the estate, though married, was childless, and his wife, like himself, was well stricken in years.

"But about twenty years ago the old man, being widowed, took it into his head to marry a young woman, who provided him with an heir of his own," replied Old Harry sarcastically.

"Are you sure that she *did* provide him with such an heir?" meaningly inquired the preacher.

"The boy is at college now, I understand," said the Colonel.

"But are you sure that the boy is really the son of the late Peter Carew?"

"Sir, I have never questioned the fact. The boy was born in wedlock, and whose ever son he is, or may be, he is certainly the legal heir of the great Raven Rock property."

"But are you perfectly satisfied that this boy who is represented as the heir of the great Raven Rock estate, was born of the marriage of Peter Carew with Katherine

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Shrewsbury? Are you satisfied that he was, in fact, the son either of Peter Carew or of his wife Katherine?"

"Sir, I have never had a doubt of it," said the Colonel, in great surprise.

"Then, Colonel Carew, I *have* a doubt of it. Circumstances have come to my knowledge lately that lead me to suspect that a child of no kindred to the Carew family has been foisted upon them as the heir of the great Carew estate."

"Good Heaven, Mr. Wilks! whatever do you mean?" exclaimed Colonel Carew, starting out of his chair.

"I mean just what I have said—that I have reason to suspect a spurious heir has been supplied, in place of the real heir that failed to make his appearance."

"Have you any proof of what you suspect?"

"No; for if I had proof, I should no longer only suspect, but should *know*."

"Will you tell me what ground you have for your suspicion?"

"The assumed heir of Raven Rocks was born at that house on the same night when another child was born there. One child was a boy, the other a girl. On that night too occurred that terrible tragedy that wrecked the household, and shocked the whole world. I need not further allude to that horror. But I have reason to suspect that in the utter consternation that fell upon the family, opportunity was afforded and seized upon to exchange the children, giving the girl born of Kate Carew to the Percies, and taking the boy born of Musadora Percie to be foisted upon the Carew family as the male heir who could alone inherit the great entailed Raven Rock estates."

"Thunder and lightning! Be careful how you hint such a thing to any one but me, sir! It might get you into

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a great deal of trouble," exclaimed Colonel Carew, in dismay.

"I have not mentioned it, and shall not mention it to another soul. When I have told you all that I have to tell you I shall have performed my duty, and shall leave the matter entirely in your hands," said Mr. Wilks.

"Proceed, sir! Proceed! Bless my soul alive! I always knew she was an insipid jade, but she was a gentleman's daughter, and I never suspected her to be capable of fraud."

Thus urged, the travelling preacher began his revelations, and when he had concluded his narrative "The Old Harry" was so well satisfied that Kate Carew had been guilty of foul play that he at once made arrangements to go to Washington the next morning—taking his family with him—and investigate the mysteries foreshadowed by Mr. Wilks's astounding story.

The next morning dawned clear and cold.

After an early breakfast, the travelling party entered the capacious close carriage, that, drawn by a pair of fine, strong horses, was to take them by easy stages to Washington City.

The preacher had been prevailed on to accompany the travellers. He therefore rode in the carriage with Colonel, Mrs. and Miss Carew, while the footman, Tom, rode his—the preacher's—horse. In this manner the party commenced their journey, which proved a very pleasant one. They reached Washington on the evening of the third day, and took apartments at "Gadsby's," then the best hotel of the city, now a tradition.

The next morning Old Harry and the preacher sat in a private smoking-room together, where they did not smoke, but arranged the conduct of their campaign against Mrs.

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Katherine Carew. After luncheon, the preacher bade his friends good-bye.

The Carew party had a fine suite of apartments at "Gadsby's," but for their own amusement, they all preferred to take their meals in the public dining-room, where they could hear all the news of the day briskly discussed among their fellow-boarders.

Of one topic they could not help hearing, that which was on every one's lips—the beauty, genius, grace and splendor of the great heiress, the reigning belle, the queen of hearts—MUSA PERCIE.

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CHAPTER VI.

A RUBY SET IN PEARLS.

MUSA PERCIE'S success was perfect. Her beauty was unrivalled. Her fortune was known to be immense. Her house was the most splendid in the city. And her entertainments were the most elegant.

Her chaperon, Mrs. Chief-Justice Shrewsbury, supplied the matronly dignity and gave the conventional tone that was needed in the establishment of the orphan beauty and heiress.

Musa Percie, moreover, loved the companionship, at all hours, of girls of her own age and rank. And she rather affected the state of a royal princess, with her maids of honor, by taking under her protection two young ladies, her own equals in birth, but inferiors in fortune, whom she attached to her service not only by liberal gifts bestowed upon them, but by a true sisterly love shown them.

The first was Clarice Shrewsbury, the daughter of her chaperon,—a pretty little, plump creature, with a round face, small features, peach-blossom complexion, golden-red hair, and bright violet eyes. She was frank, lively, witty, and often saucy.

The second companion was Armida Sutton, the daughter of Musa's foster-mother, whom she had brought from her dull farm to share her own gay city home. She was a finely formed young woman, with regular features, oval

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face, alabaster complexion, pale flaxen hair, and light blue eyes. She was cold, proud, selfish and ambitious.

The brilliant brunette between these fair blondes was, as her poetic worshippers called her, "a ruby set in pearls."

Her beauty had many ardent lovers, and her wealth had as many arduous suitors.

And she gloried in the adoration of the former and the adulation of the latter, even while affecting to laugh at the one and despise the other.

Foremost among her lovers was the young Earl of Cressy, who was an habitué of the house.

For the English travellers had not left the city immediately after the meeting of Congress, as they had intended to do. "Man proposes, and——" You know the rest.

A severe attack of gout laid up the Reverend Dr. Bishop in his chamber at "Gadsby's" for the whole winter.

"It is an ill wind that blows nobody good," says folk lore.

The ill wind for Dr. Bishop proved a very good wind for the young Earl. It detained him near the lady of his love, and left him free to seek her presence as often as he pleased, unwatched, uncriticised, and even unsuspected.

Lord Gilbert, "good Bertie," devoted himself to his suffering tutor. The worthy doctor, confined to his room, and seeing no one except his pupils and the servants of his party, and the waiters of the hotel, heard very little of the fashionable gossip of the city. If this had been otherwise, he might have heard the common rumor that connected the name of the young Earl of Cressy, the eldest son of one of England's most distinguished statesmen, with that of Musa Percie, the daughter of that most unhappy Reginald Percie, whose awful domestic tragedy had shocked the world, eighteen years before.

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For everybody had not forgotten it. Many middle-aged and elderly people remembered the catastrophe well, and spoke of it in whispers to each other.

But Musa, because she saw herself followed, fêted and worshipped for her wealth, flattered herself that the dark and bloody "blot on the escutcheon" of her family was forgotten by the world. And her only fear was that it should some day, by some one, be remembered and revived.

It was to guard against such a possible humiliation, that she resolved, in spite of all obstacles, to marry the young English Earl whose heart she had won, and to make her home with him in a foreign country, where her family tragedy was never likely to become known.

She did not love the boy deeply; but she liked him rather more than she liked any of the men she met in the world. And she quite made up her mind to marry him.

He loved her with an honest and an honorable love; of that she felt sure. He came to see her every day, and twice a day when she would let him. But there was one thing in his conduct that puzzled her. He never asked her to be his wife.

It was now nearly two months since they had first met, and she had known that he adored her. For weeks she had been expecting a proposal of marriage from him; but the proposal had not been made.

She knew that he was not that despicable creature, a male coquette; for there was truth as well as love in every glance of his clear blue eyes, and in every tone of his deep voice.

She could not comprehend his conduct. But the solution of the problem was at hand.

One morning, as she sat in her elegant boudoir, attended by her two companions—"a ruby set in pearls"—her old

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nurse Cassy entered the room without knocking, as was her privilege, and handed her young mistress a card, saying:

"It 's from the Early young man, Miss. The page has just brought it up. And the Early gentleman is waiting in the blue parlor to see you."

"Tell the boy to say that I will be down in a moment," said Musa. Cassy took the message to the page. And Miss Percie arose and glanced at the mirror before leaving the room.

She was quite satisfied with her appearance. Her toilet was sufficiently elegant to receive any morning visitor. It was in the fashion of that day. It was a crimson velvet robe, faced and turned up with ermine, and open over a white satin skirt, and at the bosom over a chemisette of linen cambric and fine lace, fastened with large single pearls. Her hair was worn as she always wore it, in glittering black ringlets clustering thickly around her beautiful dark glowing face, and falling in masses at the back of her head.

A queenly beauty she looked, as she swept from the room and descended the stairs.

A morning visit from Lord Cressy was nothing at all unusual to Musa Percie; it was, as I have said, an affair of daily occurrence.

So she entered the blue parlor gayly, to greet a frequent and always welcome visitor.

But she paused in surprise when she was half-way across the room; for she saw that something painful had happened.

Lord Cressy had arisen to meet her; but she saw that all the healthy English color had fled from his face, which was pale as that of a corpse, while his robust frame trembled, and his hand and his voice shook as he greeted her.

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"Lord Cressy, I hope you have received no ill news," said Miss Percie impulsively.

"I will tell you all about it," he answered, as he grasped her hand convulsively and took her to the sofa.

She sat down, wondering.

And he took the seat beside her and passed his hand several times across his troubled brow before he spoke again.

Then he suddenly broke forth, casting all his boyish diffidence and hesitation to the winds:

"Miss Percie! Musa, you must already know how I worship you; how I have worshipped you from the first moment in which I was so blest as to behold you. Musa, I have had it in my heart and on my lips to tell you this for weeks past. But I thought it due to my father and my mother to tell them first of the priceless treasure I had discovered in your perfections, and due to *you* also, to come to you supported by the full approbation of my family—an approbation that I did not for a moment doubt that I should receive."

He paused, as if overcome for an instant by his emotions, and then he continued:

"About a month ago, Miss Percie, I wrote to my parents, telling them of my love for you, speaking of you, not as well as you deserve—for who indeed could do you justice?—but as well as my imperfect language could treat of your perfections; asking them to bless me in my love, and to authorize my proposals to you."

"Well?" said Musa, in a gentle voice, seeing that he paused a longer time than before.

"Miss Percie, how shall I tell you? By this morning's mail I received two long letters from England—an angry one from my father, reminding me that I am still a minor, and commanding me at once to return home; and a ten-

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der one from my mother, reminding me that I had long been tacitly engaged to marry my Welsh cousin, Lady Gwendolyn Tremontane."

"Were you?" inquired Musa in a subdued voice.

"Why, I never saw the girl!" replied the young Earl, raising his eyebrows. "It was one of those family arrangements made by the elders long before the parties immediately concerned in it were old enough to choose for themselves, and therefore binding upon no one."

"Certainly not," murmured Musa, in the low tone in which she continued to take her slight part in the conversation.

"But, Miss Percie," he resumed, in a voice broken by emotion, "the bitter disappointment I have experienced to-day has taught me the depth of my love for you, the dependence of my very *life* on that love. Oh, Musa! Musa! I cannot LIVE without you! I shall not even try to do so. Oh, Miss Percie, I come to you to-day to say in words, what my whole conduct must have been saying to you for the last two months. And though I cannot bring you, as I had hoped to do, my father's and my mother's blessings to support my suit, yet I bring you the *first*, yes, and the LAST love of my whole heart and soul! For as I have never loved woman before, I never shall love woman after you. Speak to me, Musa!" he pleaded earnestly.

She knew not what to say to him. His vehemence startled and confused her.

"Oh, I hope, I *trust*," he said, fixing his eager eyes earnestly upon her beautiful face—"I *trust* that I have not foolishly, fatally deceived myself in believing that from the first you saw my love, my *life's* love for you, and—did not despise it. *Speak to me, Musa!*"

As she listened to his earnest, impassioned words, she

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almost loved the honest boy who thus laid his true heart at her feet. But she could not yet speak.

"Ah, give me some comfort!" he pleaded. "You would not discard me because my parents oppose my love—my love that is my life! Oh, Musa, though they are my parents, and I honor and revere them, I feel and know that they have no more right to oppose my love than they have to destroy my life. Ah, can you not see that for yourself? Speak to me, Musa. Give me some hope to save me from despair."

She held her hand out to him.

He caught it in his own, clasped it firmly, and drew her toward him, asking breathlessly:

"Does this mean—does this mean—that you—that you——"

She smiled on him with radiant light, and then was startled by the effect.

He clasped her with sudden rapture to his throbbing heart, panting forth his prayer:

"Musa, *will* you be my wife, *soon, now,* before I leave the country? Oh, love, if you *love* me, say Yes, say Yes!"

"But your father and your mother?" said Musa, gently withdrawing from his embrace.

"When it is done, they cannot undo it; and when they see you they must forgive me," he answered.

"You must give me time to think," she murmured softly.

"Dear love! sweet love! there *is no* time to think. Dr. Bishop will leave New York to take the steamer back to Liverpool, just as soon as his gout will enable him to travel. My brother and myself are expected to return with him, of course. I am still a minor, wanting nearly

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twelve months of my majority. And I will obey my father in all things except in this matter of my love, which is my life. In this I *must* take my own course. I will return to England as soon as possible, in compliance with my father's wishes; but, my love! my love! I must first make you my wife, that I may take you with me."

"That would be sheer madness, Lord Cressy! Think of it, for a moment! What would Dr. Bishop say? What would your brother say? Think how painful, how indelicate my position would be, going with you under these circumstances," replied Musa, with dignity.

"You would go as my honored wife. You would go as the Countess of Cressy," vehemently interrupted the lover.

"Yet as an interloper. Cressy, listen to me, my dearest. You told me just now that you wanted less than twelve months to your majority. Why not wait until you have attained it, before you talk of marriage? When you have become of age, of course neither your father nor mother can have any right to prevent your free choice of a wife; nor should I then have any hesitation in accepting you. Can you not wait for me till you are of age to choose for yourself, Cressy?"

"No! I CANNOT."

"But why?"

"Because I feel *sure* that if I leave you without making you my wife, I shall NEVER be your husband."

"Can you not trust me to wait for you a year? Or can you not trust *yourself* to wait for me so long?" she archly inquired.

"I can trust *you* and myself. But I cannot, dare not, trust FATE!"

His earnestness, approaching solemnity, awed her. She could find no words to answer him just then.

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"No, Musa Percie," he sadly resumed; "some prophetic feeling assures me that if I leave you without making you my own, I shall never see you more."

Then suddenly throwing himself down before her, he caught and clasped and kissed her hands, and bowed his head upon them, praying, beseeching:

"Oh, Musa! Musa! Do not send me from you, love! Do not! do not! You will never see me more if you do. And you will never, never meet one who will love you as I love you."

She drew her hands out of his clasp, and put them each side his head, and bent hers until her face touched his flaxen hair. She was very much moved by his emotion. She almost fancied that she loved him, as she whispered softly:

"Rise, dearest, and sit beside me. I have something to say to you."

He sprang up and placed himself on the sofa beside her, eagerly listening for her next words.

"Suppose now that I should consent to your wishes, and become your wife before you leave the country——"

"Oh, if you would! if you would! I should be the happiest man alive, and I would devote my whole life to making you the happiest woman, if I could!" he vehemently replied.

"Yes, doubtless," she answered, with a slight smile. "But listen to what I further have to say. If I should consent to marry you before you leave the country, in order that you may feel sure of me—you perceive?—would it be absolutely necessary that I should immediately go with you to England, and dare and bear all the embarrassments and humiliations that would attend my voyage and my arrival?"

"Hear me swear!" began the young Earl.

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But she smiled and laid her hands upon his lips to stop him, as she went on to explain:

"Might I not, after our marriage, remain here in my own home, while you return to England, reconcile your family to our marriage, and pave the way for me to follow you when I could feel sure of being welcomed with affection, instead of being rejected with hatred? Think for a moment."

"I am now thinking. But, love, I would rather marry you openly and bear you proudly home to England as my wife, my beautiful, honored wife. My father and my mother will be proud to call you daughter, when they shall once behold your face," said the lover.

"I cannot risk that—I will not risk it. I will consent to be your wife before you leave the country, on condition that our marriage shall be very private, and that I shall be left quietly in my own home until you go back to England and reconcile your family to receive me as their daughter. Those are the only conditions upon which I can consent to be your wife, dear Cressy," she concluded.

Love and joy and perplexity strove in his bosom, and betrayed themselves all over his face.

"I would so much rather have married you openly, and taken you openly home with me. But you shrink from that publicity. Be it as you will; you have made me happy, very happy. Bless you, bless you for that, my only love," he said, drawing her to his heart and sealing their betrothal on her lips.

"And now, dear love, my time is so short, so very short, that not a single day should part us. Let it not be a time of days, but only of hours. Tell me at what *hour* to-day you will give me this dear hand," he said, clasping and pressing her hand to his heart and to his lips.

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She was not ready to give him a satisfactory answer just then. But he prayed and besought her with so much earnestness and perseverance, that before he left her presence he had induced her to fix the day of their private marriage.

And a little later in the same week Musa Percie went out, as if for a walk, and met her lover by appointment.

They took a hack and drove out to Bladensburg.

They left the hack at the entrance of the village and walked to a country parsonage, where they were quietly married, and where the bridegroom astounded the minister by presenting him with a fee equal to half a year's salary.

After the ceremony was over they returned to their hack, and were driven back to the city.

They dismissed their hack at the stand where they had engaged it, and then walked on together for a little way up Pennsylvania Avenue. Then she paused, for she saw Mrs. Shrewsbury and some ladies of her acquaintance advancing from the opposite direction.

"You had better leave me now," she softly murmured.

"My bride! Oh, how hard it is to leave you now! When shall I see you again?" he inquired.

"Come this evening as usual. I shall be at home, of course."

"But, as usual, with a crowd of people around you, of course! When may I see you *alone*, in your own apartments?" he hastily whispered.

She did not answer immediately, so he added earnestly:

"*Do not* keep me from you! *I am your husband*, and I *love* you," he said pleadingly, as if he were still only her suitor.

"Come this evening. But go now," she answered hastily, as she saw the opposite party drawing very near.

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He lifted his hat and bowed, as to an ordinary acquaintance, and sauntered away.

"Yes, he *is* my husband now; and I wish for his sake that I could love him more. He is my husband. And I," she added mentally, "I, Reginald Percie's daughter—I am the Countess of Cressy, and shall some day be Duchess of Montcalla."

Musa walked on to meet her friends. But as she drew near them, she saw the two ladies that were with Mrs. Shrewsbury bow and smile, and turn from her to enter a fancy bazaar on the Avenue.

So Musa met Mrs. Shrewsbury only.

"Why, what a time you have been gone, my dear! Upon my word, nearly four hours! You look fatigued. And I fear that you will not be able to do justice to yourself this evening at our reception," said Mrs. Shrewsbury, with solicitude.

"On my conscience, I had forgotten all about our reception!" exclaimed Musa, with comic dismay.

"My dear girl, how could you be so very careless? And a card reception, too. And we have every reason to expect that the President will look in. My love, you must come home and take a warm bath, and a bowl of arrowroot with a glass of sherry in it, and then go right to bed until evening, so that you may be fresh and bright for our reception."

"I thank you, Mrs. Shrewsbury, and I think I will follow your advice," answered Musa, who, from fatigue and excitement, was quite as much exhausted as she seemed to be.

The old lady called a passing hack, and with her young charge entered it, and drove immediately to their own residence, where Mrs. Shrewsbury took care to see that her prescription was followed.

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After her bath and bowl of arrow-root with sherry, Musa went to bed, and fell into a dreamless sleep of several hours' duration. Then she awoke refreshed, and in good time to dress leisurely for the evening.

A sea-coal fire was burning brightly in the polished steel grate, and the gas was turned on brilliantly, as she entered her luxurious dressing-room and sat down before the tall cheval mirror of her dressing-table.

Cassy and Servia were both in attendance.

Musa preferred to have these old familiar family servants about her person, rather than to have the most fashionable and accomplished French maid that could be procured.

Servia stood waiting orders. And Cassy held carefully in her hand a large and elegant casket of inlaid ebony and ivory, which she sat down on the table before her mistress.

"What is that, Cassy?" inquired Musa, with languid curiosity.

"Well, honey, it 's sumfin the Early gentleman's white nigger fetch, with his marster's compliments," answered Cassy, with a sniff.

"Oh, Lord Cressy's groom brought this? When?" inquired Musa, taking it up.

"While you was 'sleep, honey; which I took it in myself; and here sumfin else, honey," said Cassy, taking from the mantel-piece a small white envelope and handing it to her mistress.

The outer envelope was directed to Miss Percie. But within it, besides a little parcel of tissue paper wrapped around a tiny gold key, there was a still smaller envelope directed to

THE COUNTESS OF CRESSY.

Musa's cheeks flushed as she read the new title bestowed upon her, and then she opened and read the little note:

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"I send you with this, my only love, a bridal present, selected for you weeks ago, while I still confidently hoped that I might proudly claim your dear hand before the whole world. Only your own will prevented me from doing this. But I hope you will wear these ornaments to-night; for whether the people know it or not, to-night we hold our wedding reception. CRESSY."

"How I do *wish* I could love him!" murmured Musa to herself as she pressed the little note to her lips, before even she took the key to unlock the casket.

When she lifted the elegant lid, even her eyes, accustomed to splendor, were dazzled by the magnificent set of diamonds that blazed upon them.

There were seven pieces in all—a tiara, necklace, brooch, earrings and bracelets—an offering worthy to be laid on the altar of an imperial bride.

"Oh! how I do *wish* I could love him!" she softly repeated, as she gazed upon this princely gift. "Well, if I do not love *him* as well as I ought, as well as he deserves, at least, I do not love any one *else*, and I mean to love him as well as I can, and never to tease, wound, or disappoint him; and never, *never* let him know that I do not love him utterly."

She sighed as she sought to make this compromise with her conscience, and fell into so deep a reverie over it, that she forgot how the time was flying until she was aroused by the voice of her maid Servia, saying:

"Scuse me, Miss Musa; but the clock has just struck eight, and an't it time to dress?"

"Yes, yes, certainly," said the young lady, hastily closing her casket.

"What dress shall I lay out, Miss Musa?" inquired the girl.

Musa reflected for a moment, and then, as a bright smile flitted over her face, she said:

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"Lay out the white velvet that came home yesterday."

The girl went to a wardrobe and brought forth a magnificent winter evening dress of pearl-white velvet, trimmed with white swan's-down, and with small tufts of white marabout feathers, fastened with diamonds, and edged at the low neck and short sleeves with fine point lace. This dress was trained behind, but open in front over a skirt of white rich satin, heavily embroidered with white silk floss.

When she stood before her mirror, arrayed in this rich and beautiful dress, and adorned with those magnificent and splendid jewels, she looked a very queen of beauty.

Her admiring maid and old nurse could have fallen down and worshipped her.

Servia, mute with adoration, stood gazing on her beautiful mistress.

Cassy, older and more privileged, spoke freely:

"You look just like a king's bride, Miss Musa; you do indeed. Not as ever I see a king's bride myself, but I 's heerd read of 'em. Any ways, you looks for all the world like 'a bride adorned for the bridegroom,' accordin' to the Scripter. On'y I don't see where you 'll get *yourn* from, less it 's the Early gentleman; cause he 's the onliest one I see come here any ways fit for you, and *he* an't much neither, for *you*."

"The Earl of Cressy is far above me in rank, and further yet in merit. He is noble by birth, and nobler still by nature. Servia," said the young lady, turning to her maid, "you may leave the room."

The spell-bound Servia aroused herself and went out.

"Cassy," continued Musa, sinking down upon a large chair, "come and sit here before me. I have something to tell you."

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The old nurse drew a footstool to her young lady's feet and seated herself.

"Cassy, you can keep a secret, I know," said Musa, looking down steadily into the eyes of the wondering old woman.

"Keep a secret, Miss Musa? Well, I jes 'bout reckon I kin. Keep a secret? Why, lor, honey, ef you knowed the secrets as I keep 'bout some people, it would rise your hair right up on eend! Keep a secret? *Umph, humph!*" said the old nurse emphatically.

"Then, since that is so, I 'll tell you, Cassy, for I know you will never tell anybody," said Musa. "I have 'been' and 'gone' and—got married."

"You—got—MARRIED!" cried Cassy in three separate gasps.

"Yes, Cassy. This morning, privately, while I was out," laughed Musa.

"While—you—was—out?" gasped the woman in the same way.

"And to the Earl of Cressy, too!"

"To Early Cressies *too-oo-oo!*" repeated Cassy in a long, low, fainting tone.

"Yes. Come, rouse up, old nurse, and listen to me," said Musa.

But first she went and locked both the doors of her room before she continued.

"Listen, Cassy. My husband loves me very much——"

"Course he do——"

"Hush! don't interrupt me. He loves me better than he loves himself. But he is going back to his own country in a few days, and after that he will not see me again for some months; not, indeed, until he comes again to take me to his own home. Do you understand?"

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"Yes 'm; *tries* to."

"Well, to-night he is coming with the rest of the gay company, but he will not have a chance, in a house full of people, even to say a word to me in private."

"Course not. Whisperin' 's rude in company."

"Certainly. But he is my own husband, and he *must* speak to me alone, if he wishes to do so."

"Course he ought to."

"And therefore, nurse, I want you—listen to me now! —I want you to sit up here *alone*, in my rooms, until all the company have gone and everybody in the house has retired to bed."

"Yes, I see."

"And then I want you to admit my husband, and bring him here to my sitting-room. You understand?"

"Yes 'm, I understand," said Cassy. "And my hair, as sixty year hasn't turned gray, will be white afore mornin', I know," she added, in an inaudible voice.

"For remember he is my husband, and he loves me," said Musa. "Oh, that I could love him as I ought!" she mentally added, with a sigh.

"Well, that 's nateral; yes, werry nateral; but it will 'bring down my gray hairs,' I know it will," groaned the old nurse.

"And now I must go down. I really must," suddenly exclaimed the young lady, rising from her seat and shaking her splendid dress into order as she sailed from the room.

She descended into the magnificent and brilliantly lighted drawing-rooms, where, in the third or rear room, sat Mrs. and Miss Shrewsbury and Miss Sutton.

No company had yet arrived.

"My lady in waiting and my two maids of honor," said

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Musa, quaintly smiling, as the three women came forward to meet her.

They were also very handsomely dressed.

Mrs. Shrewsbury wore a black velvet dress, point lace cap and collar and sleeves, and diamond pin and earrings.

Miss Shrewsbury wore a bright blue silk dress, with an overdress of gossamer tulle, and a few blue forget-me-nots and white rose buds in her red gold hair and on her bosom. No jewelry.

Miss Sutton wore a rose-colored silk dress with a white tulle overdress, with pink and white roses in her pale flaxen tresses and on her bosom. No jewelry.

"My dear child, you blind us," said Mrs. Shrewsbury, surveying with astonished eyes the magnificent dress of her patroness.

"You are a vision of glory, an angel of light!" said Clarice Shrewsbury, opening wide her deep blue eyes, in genuine love and admiration of her beautiful friend.

"That is an elegant white velvet dress certainly. There can be no doubt about that," thought Meda Sutton as she surveyed Musa with critical envy. "But, unless that jewelry is worthless French paste, which it is a disgrace for her to wear, she must have sunk half her estate in the purchase of diamonds."

"I suppose the purchase of that set is what kept you out so long this morning," said Mrs. Shrewsbury.

"Yes, it was," said Musa, speaking truly, though with a hidden meaning.

"I did not think there was such a set as that on exhibition in——"

"They have never been on exhibition here; they were ordered from Paris," said Musa, smiling at the mystification of the old lady.

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"Oh, indeed. Through whom did you order them, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Shrewsbury.

"Excuse me. I think some one is coming," observed the young lady evasively.

Some one *was* coming, for the next moment the Earl of Cressy was announced.

The rooms filled rapidly, and as a constant procession of ladies and gentlemen passed up to greet their hostess, and exchange a few words before passing on, the Earl of Cressy found scarcely a moment in which to speak to his bride.

But nevertheless, he stood by her side the whole evening, feeling that he had the right to do so, and scarcely caring to conceal that feeling from the world. And how he gloried in her beauty, and in the adoration it inspired, and the worship it received! He was radiant in her light.

The company began to separate soon after twelve, midnight, and by one o'clock the rooms were empty.

The Earl of Cressy had but a moment's private conversation with his wife—just time to ask pleadingly:

"You will let me see you this evening?"

"Yes," she answered. "Come back in an hour, and rap; don't ring. My old nurse will be waiting to admit you."

"Bless you, my love of loves," he murmured, as he raised her hand to his lips; and then he had to turn from her immediately, for others were approaching to bid her good-night.

When the company had all gone, Musa sank down exhausted in her seat. She had been standing nearly the whole evening.

Mrs. Shrewsbury and the two young ladies came up to her.

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"Let me congratulate you, my dear, on your success this evening. If you had not been a queen of beauty and fashion before this, you would be so from to-night," said Mrs. Shrewsbury warmly.

"I don't know," said Musa, putting her gloved hand to her lips to stifle a yawn, "I don't know. I think it is my house more than myself that draws the world. People like to come together in pleasant places for purposes of amusement and mutual admiration, and my rooms suit them. But I know I am very weary, and I think I will retire," she added, rising and holding out her hand to Mrs. Shrewsbury.

"Yes, poor darling, you are almost worn out. There, hurry off, and get to sleep as soon as possible. And we will soon follow your example," replied the old lady.

Musa kissed them all good-night, and escaped up-stairs to her rooms, there to await in nervous trepidation the moment when the household should be sound asleep and her newly married husband should be admitted to her presence.

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CHAPTER VII.

AFTER THE SECRET MARRIAGE.

LATE on the morning succeeding her brilliant reception, Musa, her chaperon and her two young companions were lingering over their very late breakfast, when a servant entered with a card and laid it before Mrs. Shrewsbury.

"Bless me!" exclaimed that lady.

"What is it?" inquired Musa carelessly.

"Here is my niece, Kate Carew, come at last!" said Mrs. Chief-Justice.

All three of the ladies arose from the table at once. They had really finished breakfast some moments before, however.

"Where did you show the lady, John?" inquired Mrs. Shrewsbury, bustling toward the door.

"In the small front reception-room, Madam," answered the man.

"I will go there and see her at once. My dear Musa, you need not trouble yourself now to come and welcome her. I dare say she has been travelling all night in the cars, and is covered with smoke and railroad dust. I will take her to her room, and when she has attended to her toilet I will bring her to you," said Mrs. Shrewsbury.

"As you please. You will find me in the little blue parlor, where I shall be very happy to welcome your niece," said Musa pleasantly, as she followed the old lady from the breakfast-room.

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Half an hour after this Musa sat in the blue parlor, attended by her two young companions and awaiting the entrance of her visitor.

Musa looked very lovely this morning. Her cheeks and lips were flushed with a rich warm bloom, her eyes were filled with soft fire, and her whole face irradiated as from within by some deep happy dream.

She wore a graceful morning robe of white merino, embroidered with a border of white roses, and trimmed with swan's-down and lined with rose-colored satin.

Her two companions were also very tastefully dressed in blue cashmere robes, embroidered with white flowers and lined with white silk.

At length the door opened and Mrs. Shrewsbury entered, ushering in a lady of tall, commanding form and air, whose dark, rich, ripe beauty at once fascinated the attention of the three young ladies on the sofa.

Musa gazed on her at first with surprise and admiration, and then with a strange, keen heartache, which she could neither understand nor shake off.

Clarice Shrewsbury and Meda Sutton looked from Mrs. Carew to Musa, and then at each other; their mutual look expressing clearly their amazement at the likeness between the two beauties—a likeness that, but for the difference of years, made them counterparts of each other.

Mrs. Shrewsbury had noticed this likeness before, and was more than ever struck by the fac-similitude between the two, now that she saw them together.

"Miss Percie, my niece Mrs. Carew, of Richmond," said Mrs. Chief-Justice, formally presenting the visitor.

Musa's heart stood still for a moment and then beat fast, she knew not why. But she arose and gave her hand to the beautiful guest, saying very sweetly:

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"I am delighted to see you, Mrs. Carew. We have been anxiously expecting you for some days. I have heard so much of you from Mrs. Shrewsbury that I cannot meet you as a stranger. I hope that you will feel at home with us."

Kate Carew's breath came thick and short. Her complexion paled and flushed in rapid succession. She could scarcely falter forth the words of her reply:

"Thanks. I am very sure that I shall soon feel quite at home with you."

"I am afraid that you are tired. Perhaps you will lie down on the sofa and rest a while," said Musa, noticing the nervousness of the lady.

"Thanks; no, I will not lie down. It is true that I am a little shaken with my night's journey, but I shall get over it quite as well sitting up as lying down. These are your young lady companions of whom Mrs. Shrewsbury has written to me," said Kate Carew, indicating the two young ladies.

"Oh, excuse me, pray. Your evident fatigue made me forget to introduce them. My friends, Miss Shrewsbury and Miss Sutton, Mrs. Carew," said Musa.

The two blonde beauties arose and courtesied.

But Mrs. Carew shook hands warmly with Meda Sutton, and then drew Clarice Shrewsbury to her bosom and kissed her fondly.

At this moment a servant entered the room with a card on a silver waiter, which he handed to Mrs. Carew.

"For me!" she exclaimed in genuine surprise. "This cannot be intended for me, for no one knows that I am in the city. They have not had time to know it, of course, for I have just come."

"The visit is to you, Madam. The gentleman inquired if Mrs. Carew of Richmond was in the house; and I told

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him the lady had just arrived. And he directed me to take you his card," respectfully answered the man.

"Who is it, Kate, my dear?" inquired Mrs. Shrewsbury.

"A man I do not know from Adam. Let me see—'Colonel HAROLD CAREW, Pirate's Peak, Md.,'" said Kate Carew, reading slowly.

"Oh, yes, you *must* know who that is. Colonel Carew of Pirate's Peak, your husband's cousin, who, failing your son, would have inherited the whole of the Carew estate in Virginia. You must have heard Mr. Peter Carew speak of him."

"I—may have done so. I—do not clearly recollect," faltered Mrs. Carew, changing color. "But it is strange he should call to see *me*," she added.

"Not at all, I think, considering that you are his cousin's widow," put in the old lady.

"But how should he know that I am here? Who could have told him?" inquired Kate Carew, with an anxiety she could scarcely conceal.

"Ah, there's the mystery. I am sure I do not know. You had better ask him when you see him."

"I think I will. And I must go and see him now," said Mrs. Carew, rising.

"Where did you show the gentleman, John?" inquired Mrs. Shrewsbury.

"In the small reception-room, Madam," answered the man.

"Ah! Attend Mrs. Carew to that room, John," said the old lady.

The man bowed, opened the door for the lady to pass out, and then followed her from the parlor.

When Kate Carew entered the elegant little reception-

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room, she saw standing on the rug a tall, stout, red-haired, red-bearded and red-faced old man, who immediately bowed and came forward to meet her.

"Colonel Carew, I presume," said the lady, offering her hand.

"The same, Madam, and I hope I have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Katherine Carew, the widow of my cousin Peter Carew," said Old Harry, holding the hand she had given him, and forgetting, while he gazed on her beauty, all the dark suspicions he had entertained against her.

"Yes, sir, I am your cousin's widow, and as such, a sort of cousin of your own," replied Kate Carew with so sweet a smile, that Old Harry tightened his hold upon her hand and drew her closer to him, while he said:

"I am very glad to meet you, my beautiful cousin; so glad that I count all the years lost in which I might have made your acquaintance and did not do so. Come, now, I must claim a cousin's privilege," he added, as he bent down and kissed her lips heartily, before she knew what he was about.

"There—that 's done!" chuckled the Old Harry, smacking his lips; "that 's done, even if I get my ears boxed for it afterward."

But she did not box his ears; it was her cue to make a friend of this heir-at-law of the Carew estates. So she smiled bewitchingly upon him as she rolled forward a large easy chair, and said:

"Sit down and make yourself comfortable, Cousin Harold."

"Cousin Harold!" How youthful that sounded! He had not been called "Cousin Harold" since the days of his young manhood, when he had been a spruce young beau, at Pirate's Peak, claiming cousinship and kissing

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privileges with all the pretty girls of the region round about.

"'Cousin Harold!' Come, that sounds friendly. I thank you, my beautiful cousin," said Old Harry heartily, as he took the offered chair and seated himself beside her, before the glowing grate.

"And mind, you must call me Cousin Kate, do you hear?" she said confidentially.

"Cousin Kate, I will do so with the greatest pleasure. And what a pretty name it is! Cousin Kate!"

"And now, Cousin Harold, please tell me by 'what conjurations and what mighty magic' you discovered my presence in this house, where I only arrived this morning," archly inquired the lady.

"Why, do you suppose, Cousin Kate, that a first-class beauty like yourself could leave her sphere without creating a darkness and desolation that would make itself felt all over the country? No, my dear cousin. I heard the wailings of your bereaved admirers all the way down to Pirate's Peak," replied Old Harry, in a bantering tone.

It was a stupid speech of the old fellow. But Kate Carew laughed merrily and charmingly, as if he had said something very witty. And as she understood that he had evaded her question, she did not press it.

"So you only arrived to-day, my pretty cousin. That is a curious coincidence, for I only arrived to-day," said Old Harry.

"Indeed! And—you make a long stay, I hope, Cousin Harold?" sweetly inquired Kate Carew.

"I—don't know," gravely and hesitatingly replied Old Harry, as he suddenly recollected the business that had brought him to the city, and realized how entirely he had lost sight of it under the witchery of Kate Carew's pres-

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ence. "I really do not know how long I shall stay in the city. I have not been here since I was in Congress some years ago. And now I have brought my wife and daughter with me. We are at Gadsby's," he added.

"Oh, indeed! Miss Percie and myself will certainly call and see the ladies. And I hope you will stay long enough to allow us time to show them some friendly attentions."

"I really do not know," repeated the Old Harry, running his big fingers through his red hair, for, in truth, he was woefully confused and perplexed between the charming influence of Kate Carew's beautiful presence, and the strong suspicions that had taken previous possession of his mind against her. "I do not know yet. But, by the way, is your friend Miss Percie at home?"

"Oh, yes; would you like to see her?"

"I think I would. I used to know her father in his youth. And, by the way, speaking of Reginald Percie, who would ever have imagined that gay, gallant, high-toned young gentleman would ever have come to such a tragic end! Does his daughter know anything about it?" gravely inquired Colonel Carew.

"I think not. No one ever mentions the name of her father, or her mother, in her presence. And I beg, if you see Miss Percie you will refrain from alluding to her parents in any way," said Kate Carew solemnly.

"I must not even tell her that I knew her father when he was a fine young gentleman, I suppose," said Old Harry, opening his eyes.

"No, not for the world! Do not allude to him in any way whatever," earnestly repeated the lady, as she pulled the bell-cord.

The hall footman answered the call.

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"John, go to Miss Percie, with Colonel Carew's compliments, and he would be pleased to see her if she will receive him."

The man bowed and vanished, and soon reappeared to say that Miss Percie would be glad to see Colonel Carew, if the Colonel would please to walk up-stairs.

Colonel Carew arose and gallantly offered his arm to his beautiful cousin, and they followed the servant up-stairs and into the blue parlor, where remained our "ruby set in pearls."

Colonel Carew was presented to Musa, the gloriously beautiful brunette, and to the two fair blondes, and to the stately Mrs. Chief-Justice, all in such quick succession, that between the dazzle of beauty and fashion and finery, he was so perplexed and bewildered as scarcely to know where he stood or what he said.

At length he found himself seated in a comfortable easy chair near the fire, and with the ladies grouped about him. Then he had leisure to look around. And the first thing that caught his eyes was the striking likeness between Kate Carew and Musa Percie.

After looking from one to the other several times, and with amazement expressed in every feature of his face, he startled the whole circle by exclaiming:

"Why, I never saw such a likeness in all the days of my life! Why, Cousin Kate, that young lady, Miss Percie, is enough like you to be your twin sister!"

Kate Carew changed color, but summoning all her powers of self-control, she answered calmly:

"Yes, there is certainly a most wonderful resemblance between Miss Percie and myself. But then you must know we are distantly connected."

"Ah, indeed; I did not know that."

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"Oh, yes; *very* distantly, however; hardly worth mentioning, except as an instance of how some family likenesses may be carried down for many generations. Our great-great-grandmother was the same woman—a famous beauty of Charles the Second's court. I have her likeness in my house at Richmond. It is the express image of Musa and of me. I would like to show it to you, as a curiosity, some day, if ever I shall have the pleasure of receiving you under my own roof."

"I should like very much to see that portrait. It would be well worth a journey to Richmond to look upon the portrait of your mutual ancestress, who was a beauty in the court of Charles the Second," said Colonel Carew gallantly, and with a bow that included both ladies.

Mrs. Shrewsbury and the two blondes heartily agreed with him.

But Musa sat in wondering silence. She had never heard of the distant relationship existing between herself and Mrs. Carew, and never dreamed of any ancestress of hers in the profligate court of the second Charles.

Now Mrs. Carew really had a very plausible picture to show, when the time should come to show it. But it was not a portrait of any one of her foremothers.

It was, on the contrary, a portrait of herself. It had been painted in the early days of her brief married life, while she and her husband were staying in Paris, and by a French artist of great celebrity.

It represented Kate Carew in the costume she had worn at a famous fancy ball in that city, at which she appeared as a French marchioness of the time of Louis the Fourteenth.

But the dress equally suited the court beauty of the time of Charles the Second.

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And Mrs. Kate Carew always paraded that picture as the portrait of her ancestress, and there was no one to contradict her, but many to confirm her, on the sole ground of the likeness between her so-called ancestress and herself.

Soon after this, Colonel Carew arose to depart, saying that he could not leave his wife and daughter long in a strange hotel, for they would feel lonesome.

He invited the ladies present to call on Mrs. and Miss Carew. They promised to do so the very next day.

And so Colonel Carew bade them all good-morning and left the house.

When he was once more out in the air, he drew a deep breath, and walked rapidly toward the Avenue.

"Well," he said to himself, "she may pretend to talk of a common, remote ancestress, by way of explaining the likeness, but it won't do. No, it won't do. Taking that extraordinary likeness, together with what has been told me, I see plainly that those two ladies are mother and daughter—mother and daughter! And besides the likeness to herself, there is sometimes an expression in the girl's face reminding one so forcibly of the Carews, that in fact there can be no doubt about her parentage. And if it is true that she is the daughter of Peter Carew and Kate his wife, then I fear all the rest is true that Wilks suspects. Good Heaven! and she such a beautiful woman, with such charming manners! Could a woman so perfectly lovely be so very evil? I doubt it; I doubt it. But then the circumstances are so very strong against her. Only they did not seem to have any force at all, while I was looking at her and listening to her. Ah, well, if she is to be exposed and prosecuted, some one else must do it; I cannot. I thought I was a Samson, but I have found a Delilah. But then she may not be guilty, strong as the circumstances

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are against her. And then, again, she may be. I don't know what to think."

And he didn't, nor did any one else, who undertook to study Kate Carew.

Days passed into weeks, and the Old Harry with his party lingered in the city, either forgetting all about the detective business that had first brought him there, or remembering it only to think what a prying, meddlesome, suspicious prig that Wilks fellow was, to be sure, and what a fool he himself had been to be influenced by him, and to thank his stars that he had not hinted the matter to Mrs. Carew, or to any one else.

But in the meantime, what of the recently married pair?

Their honeymoon was a very strange one. They met every day in public, and every night in private. All their circle witnessed their public association. No one but old Cassy saw their private meeting until one unlucky night, when a domestic spy watched and detected them.

This spy was Armida Sutton. I have said before that she was a fair, cold, proud and ruthless girl. She had come to live with her foster-sister Musa, not from love, but from ambition.

Taken from her widowed mother's poverty-stricken farm-house among the hills of Montgomery county, and brought to her wealthy foster-sister's splendid mansion in Washington City, caressed with affection, enriched with presents, arrayed like a princess, introduced into the best society of the capital, Armida Sutton felt no sense of obligation or thankfulness to her benefactress—felt only envy and hatred of the reigning beauty and wealthy heiress. She was dissatisfied with herself, and disgusted with her position.

"I am only her foil; only one of her train; a dependent

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maid of honor to this queen of society; a dim pearl in the setting of this brilliant ruby. I will not have it so much longer. I hate her; I hate the place, and I hate myself!" hissed this household serpent to herself, not once, but many times.

There is no passion so sharp-eyed as hatred.

And consequently Armida Sutton, who hated Musa as only traitors can hate their benefactors, soon suspected that there was something very odd, to say the least, between the young Earl of Cressy and the youthful lady of the house.

She communicated her suspicions to no one, and resolved to keep them a profound secret, and to constitute herself a sleepless spy upon the actions of Musa, in the hope of making some discovery that should give her the power to humble this queen, perhaps even to ruin this woman. One evening her perseverance was rewarded.

The Earl had been spending an unusually quiet evening at Vermont Avenue. It happened to be Ash-Wednesday, the first day of the Lenten season, and the ladies of the family being all "High Church" women, kept the day holy, neither making visits nor receiving any, except of those very intimate friends who at all times had the *entrée* of the house.

That evening Lord Cressy was their only visitor. His lordship stayed until eleven o'clock. Just before he took leave he went over and sat by Musa, and began talking of the grand style in which the *Miserere* had been rendered by the choir of St. John's Church, at the service that morning. Armida was not deceived by the public character of that topic. Moving about the room with seeming indifference, she quietly approached a book-stand behind the pair. There, unperceived by them, she began

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softly turning over the books, as if in search of something.

They spoke of the music for a moment longer, and then the young Earl suddenly dropped his voice to the lowest tone and murmured a question:

"To-night as usual, love?"

She answered in the same low tone:

"Yes, but earlier—twelve o'clock."

Then immediately she took up the subject of the music again.

Armida had heard enough. Selecting a book, she glided away from the table and resumed her seat on the sofa, where she began turning over the leaves of the volume, as if examining the engravings with which it was illustrated. When the young Earl arose and took leave the family circle left the drawing-room, and went to their several apartments. All immediately went to bed and to sleep, with two exceptions—Musa and Armida.

Musa, Countess of Cressy, sat in her sitting-room, waiting for the visit of her devoted young husband, whose earnest love had at length won some return of appreciative affection.

Armida's chamber was just across the broad middle hall, and opposite Musa's.

It was a front room, and with front windows overlooking the street. Armida had lowered her gas to a mere blue speck, and sat at the window, peering through a narrow opening of the shutter, to detect the coming of Lord Cressy.

At length she saw the figure of a man, whom she presently recognized as Lord Cressy, swiftly and silently glide up to the street door. He did not knock or ring. But there he was.

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Armida slipped off her shoes, and crossing her room in her stocking feet, knelt down at her door and peeped through the key-hole.

She saw old Cassy come softly out of Musa's dressing-room, and creep noiselessly down the stairs. She listened intently, but could not hear the old woman open the street door, whose locks and bolts and hinges were so well oiled that they worked silently. Neither could she hear footsteps coming up the thickly-carpeted stairs and hall. But by keeping her eye at the key-hole, she presently saw Lord Cressy, attended by Cassy.

The old woman opened the door of Musa's room, admitted the Earl, and then went back down the hall and out of Armida's limited range of vision.

Armida turned the key straight in the key-hole again, went and closed her shutter tightly, and then turned up the gas and looked at her watch. It was just three minutes past twelve.

"My lord is punctual," she said to herself, with an ugly sneer. "It is just about three minutes since he came. He must have stepped upon the threshold with quite dramatic punctuality, just as the hands of the city clocks were all pointing to twelve. Now it remains to be seen at what hour his lordship will depart."

Armida ought to have been quite as tired as any of her friends; but the eagerness of the detective and the excitement of the pursuit kept her wide awake, and insensible to fatigue.

She took off her elegant evening dress, the gift of Musa, and wrapped herself up in a warm quilted silk wrapper, also Musa's gift, and sat down in her easy chair by the glowing coal fire, to wait and watch for the departure of the young Earl. It was a very weary vigil. Hour after

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hour passed, and no sound disturbed the profound stillness of the sleeping house.

The dawn was faintly showing through the slats of the front hall window immediately above the street door, and dimly adding to the light given by the low gas burner near the head of the stairs, when her long vigil was rewarded with success.

Musa's door opened noiselessly and the Earl of Cressy came out, and glided silently down the hall and past her range of vision.

She arose softly from her knees, and went and opened the window shutter just wide enough to allow her to see the front steps. In a moment she saw Lord Cressy come out and walk down the steps, and down the sidewalk. It was now daylight, but the sun had not yet risen. When the Earl was out of sight, she closed her window shutter and went to bed, wearied with her long watch, but gloating over its success.

"And now," she said, "I have this peerless beauty, this wealthy heiress, this idolized queen of society in my power, at my mercy, with her haughty neck beneath my heel! Who would have thought it? *I* would have thought it. I *did* think it, or I wouldn't have watched her so closely, and never have detected her at last. And why should I not have thought it? She is the daughter of Musadora Percie. I always believed the very worst that was said of Dora Percie. I always believed her to be more deeply criminal than her most unhappy husband ever suspected her to be. And this Musa Percie is her daughter, and of course inherits her nature. 'As the mother is the daughter.' That is true in this case, if it is not in every instance. And now I must try to go to sleep."

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And saying this, Armida nestled down among her pillows, fell asleep, and slept until quite late in the forenoon.

The other ladies of the family were all punctual that morning at their nine o'clock breakfast table; and after breakfast, they dispersed about their morning affairs.

Musa sauntered into her elegant morning parlor, and took up a book to while away the hours of the forenoon until some one should call.

Some one called almost immediately.

Lord Cressy was announced, and entered the room.

Musa came to receive him, holding out both her hands in welcome. But he looked so grave and troubled, as he took and pressed them, that Musa perceived at once he had some ill news to communicate.

"I am very fortunate to find you alone, love, for I have something to tell you, and something to urge upon you," he said, as he led her back to her seat by the fire.

She looked up at him with anxious interest.

He placed himself beside her, took her hand and said:

"Love, I have had a letter from England. It came from my mother this time. She writes me that my father is ill, very ill, indeed almost at the point of death. Oh, dearest love, he may be dead before I have time to get back to him. He may be dead even now. My mother writes to entreat me to return home instantly, adding that if Dr. Bishop should be still too ill to travel, we must leave him here, under the care of the servants, and set out instantly for England."

Musa listened gravely to his words, and when he had finished speaking, she drew his head down upon her bosom with a tender caress, and in a low, sympathetic tone, she murmured:

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"I am so grieved to hear this, dear Cressy. Tell me what I can do to help you to bear it."

"Dear wife, I came here to tell you that, as well as the other. Of course we are going back to England by the first steamer that sails. There will be one on Saturday. This is Thursday. We leave Washington for New York to-morrow morning to meet that steamer."

"So it is really settled that you go on Friday morning?"

"It is really settled so, my dearest love. The most sacred duty compels us to go. But, Musa, my life, my soul, you must go with me; you must, indeed. We must announce our marriage to-day, and you must leave the city with me to-morrow, and go with me to England, and to my father's house in London, where the family have been staying since the meeting of Parliament in February. I shall announce our marriage to the ladies of your household before I leave the house, and to my brother and our tutor as soon as I get back to the hotel, and I shall publish it in all the evening papers," said the Earl, rising, and for the first time since the marriage attempting to take the husband's place as head of the wife.

She looked at him for a moment in cynical silence, and then said ironically:

"In this primitive country where I was brought up, it has always been considered that a man's word to a woman should be as good as his bond; but it seems that in the higher civilization of your nation, my lord, an Earl's oath to a lady is of no weight whatever—when it pleases him to break it."

"Musa! In the name of Heaven, now what reproach is hidden in your bitter words? What do you mean?" inquired the Earl in surprise and trouble.

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"Only this, Lord Cressy: before I gave my hand to you in marriage, I obtained your word of honor not to announce our marriage without my consent until your parents should be brought to accept me as their daughter-in-law. And now, although your parents have not been brought to accept me as their daughter-in-law, and I do not consent to the announcement of our marriage, notwithstanding your sacred word of honor to the contrary, you express a resolution to announce our marriage immediately to my friends and yours, and to publish it in all the evening papers. I do not know how your code interprets such a course of action, and I do not care to say how mine does."

"Musa!" exclaimed the young Earl, flushing to his forehead, "I never broke my word to man, woman, child, or any other creature in my life. I had forgotten how firm a promise you exacted from me. Of course, if you hold me to that promise I cannot break it; but oh, my darling girl, I cannot bear to leave you in a false and perilous position," he added tenderly.

"Perilous?" she repeated interrogatively.

"Yes, perilous; and perilous because false. A married wife, but an unknown wife, bearing your maiden name, with the ocean between yourself and your husband, who can tell what may happen before we meet again? I tell you, Musa, my mind is filled with forebodings for you. Release me from my promise, Musa. Let me place you in your true position before I leave you," he pleaded.

"I cannot," she answered, with fatal persistence. "I am not afraid of anything except making a town talk here or meeting a cool reception in England. You must have patience, dear Cressy. Leave me here as I am, without doing anything to make a talk. And go to England and

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seize the first favorable opportunity to announce our marriage to your family, and reconcile them to the inevitable before you come back to fetch me. There, there comes Mrs. Shrewsbury.'

At the same moment the widow of the Chief-Justice sailed into the room. The Earl arose and took leave; but he came with his brother in the afternoon, when Lord Gilbert called to say good-bye.

He came in the evening to visit Musa in the drawing-room, and he came again secretly at night, to remain with his wife up to the last possible moment.

Armida Sutton watched them well that night, and saw through her key-hole the final parting, when Musa came out with him into the hall, and even accompanied him down the stairs.

Then, from the crevice in her window shutter, Armida watched for his departure. But she had to watch some time. They lingered long at the door. She could not see them, but she knew they were there, and when she listened attentively, she could hear the low murmur of his voice and the low sound of her sobs.

Yes; she was sobbing. The parting was harder than she had thought it would be. For if she did not love him as much as his devotion to her merited, at least she felt his departure very keenly.

Even in those last moments on the threshold, he renewed his entreaties that she would release him from his promise, and allow him to announce their marriage.

But she kept her fatal resolution.

And after one last, long, lingering embrace, he wrenched himself from her and hurried down the street.

On Saturday morning the footman entered with letters that the postman had just brought. There were letters for

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each one of the ladies. And as breakfast was over, they separated to read them. Musa's letter was postmarked New York, February twenty-fifth, and it was sealed with a coronet. She knew it came from her husband. She hastened to her own room to enjoy her treasure alone.

The Earl had written immediately on his arrival at New York, in order to secure the return mail. Therefore the letter was necessarily short, but it was full of earnest expressions of affection and constancy. He and his party were to sail for Liverpool the next morning, he said, and were required to be on board ship at ten o'clock. But he would spend the night in writing to her, and post his next letter the last moment before the morning mail should leave the hotel for the post-office. The letter was signed her "devoted lover and husband, CRESSY," and it was inclosed in two envelopes, the outer one directed to Miss Percie, Vermont Avenue, Washington City, and the inner one to the Countess of Cressy.

"I never thought I should love him as I do. I never knew how much I loved him till he left me. Heaven forgive me. I married him for his rank and title, rather than for the great love he offered me; though I loved him a little for that even then. Oh, it is seldom, I fear, that a woman wins love as purely unselfish, as ardent and earnest as his," said Musa, as she pressed the letter to her lips and then placed it in her bosom.

And then she waited anxiously for the next letter, which she expected by the next mail.

This was Saturday afternoon. She knew that it was on its way to her even then, and would come by the late mail that night.

Meanwhile she followed her lover husband in the spirit out to sea, and tried to think what he was thinking, to feel

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what he was feeling, and to see what he was doing. And she became sure that he was thinking of her, loving her, and writing a diary for her, to be sent at intervals, as opportunity afforded.

The night's post brought her a large packet, directed on the outside to Miss Percie, and on the inside to the Countess of Cressy. There were twelve closely written pages of note paper, filled from beginning to end with the oldest and newest story ever told, sung, or written—"love, still love."

An outside barbarian who had never been in love might well wonder how so much could be said so eloquently on the one subject.

Musa kissed this letter, and put it under her cheek on her pillow to dream of when she went to sleep.

On Sunday she put it in her bosom, and took it to church with her, and it really seemed to warm her heart and help her devotions; and oh! how earnestly she entered into that portion of the Litany in which the Church prays—"That it may please Thee to preserve all who travel by land or by water."

She had repeated this mechanically every Sunday morning since she could remember. Now her whole soul went up in the petition.

On Monday morning she was agreeably surprised by receiving something else from Lord Cressy. It was a small, registered parcel this time, and it contained a casket inclosing a priceless jewel, and with it a hasty note from the Earl, dated Saturday morning, half-past nine o'clock, and was as follows:

"I send you with this, my darling wife, an emblematic gem—a ruby set in pearls. I was so fortunate as to get it this morning in time to send it to you before I leave. I am almost egotistical enough

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to ask you to put it on your bosom, and wear it in memory of me until we meet. I hope you received the long letter I wrote last night and mailed at five this morning. The hack waits to take me to the steamer. I will write again by the pilot. Your own to all eternity,

"CRESSY."

"How he loves me! Ah! how he loves me, and how little I deserve it! I ought to adore him, and I wish I did. But I do love him more than I ever thought I should, after all," said Musa, as her tears fell upon the little note.

To do her justice, she had just barely glanced at the costly jewel before she read his note, which her eyes lingered over and her lips touched again and again.

But now she took the gem from its case and examined it.

It was a large ruby of the purest burning fire, set round with pale gleaming pearls.

Its value could scarcely be computed.

It was not a jewel proper for a morning dress, yet she immediately stuck it on the bosom of her white cashmere robe, on which it blazed like a burning star. And she made up her mind to wear it morning, noon, and evening, in spite of fashion and criticism; for she loved the burning gem for the sake of the giver, for its own sake, and for its emblematic meaning, and it was a comfort to have it on her bosom.

The next morning's mail brought her another letter from the Earl of Cressy.

It was directed as its predecessors had been, on the outside to Miss Percie, and on the inside to the Countess of Cressy.

It was dated, "Steamship *Darien*, off Sandy Hook, Saturday night."

It had been sent back by the pilot boat, and mailed in New York Sunday night.

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It was a warm, strong, affectionate letter, from beginning to end, and contained much more practical wisdom than is usually to be found in such missives, if we judge from the specimens that have occasionally met the public eye.

In it he reminded her that this must necessarily be the last she could receive from him for some weeks, unless he should be so fortunate as to meet some homeward-bound ship, by which he could send back a letter from mid-ocean. But in any case he would keep a diary during the voyage, and send it to her by the very first opportunity, whether that should be afforded by a homeward-bound ship, or the general post-office at Liverpool. He begged her to write to him by the next steamer, so that he might hear from her soon after his arrival at home. And he carefully inclosed to her his London address, lest she should have lost or mislaid the one he had left with her.

And lastly, when reluctantly compelled to close this farewell letter, he commended her to the keeping of the Lord and his holy angels, and signed himself hers before heaven, "For Time and Eternity, CRESSY."

Musa ardently hoped for other letters from her husband, but none came. Days and weeks passed, and yet no letter came from the Earl. Musa grew sick at heart, and a great dread oppressed her. Her appetite failed; she could not sleep; she grew pale and haggard. One night she heard the clock strike one, then two, then three, then four; and then, before it struck five, she suddenly dropped into a deep and dreamless sleep of exhaustion that lasted until noon.

When she awoke she found old Cassy quietly sitting by her bed.

"Why, how came you here, nurse?" she inquired.

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"I came in here airly dis mornin', as usil, to help you to dress, but seein' as you was asleep I wouldn't 'sturb you. And you *has* had a good long sleep, thank goodness, honey."

"You say you came in here early. Isn't it early now?" inquired Musa in surprise.

"Why, lor! no, honey, it's arter twelve o'clock!" exclaimed the old woman.

Musa started up in the bed and stared with surprise for a moment, and then eagerly inquired:

"Has—has any one arrived at the house to-day?"

"No, honey, not a single soul, 'cept it was that funny ole letter carrier."

"Any letters?" quickly demanded the young lady.

"No, honey; not a single one for nobody."

Musa's head fell back upon her pillow.

"Der was a newspaper come for you, dough, honey," added Cassy, after a pause.

"A newspaper! Bring it to me then, and open the blinds," said Musa, anxious to look at the list of passengers by the *Darien*, to see if the name of the Earl of Cressy might not be among them.

Cassy went no farther than the mantel-shelf, from which she took a thick paper packet, that she brought to her mistress.

"Now open the blinds—quickly!" said Musa, as she tore off the envelope.

The flood of light that soon poured into the room showed Musa that the paper she held in her hand was not a New York paper, as she had supposed, but a copy of the *London Times*.

She reverted to the envelope, to see if the handwriting was that of Lord Cressy, and she saw at once that it was

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not. She looked at the date of the paper. It was April 5th.

It was the only copy of a London paper that had ever been sent to her, and she naturally supposed that this one had been sent for some especial purpose, or upon account of some particular article it contained, to which the sender wished to call her attention.

So she sat up in bed and opened the broad newspaper to its full dimensions, and spread it out on the counterpane before her.

And she looked up and down, and back and forth, but saw nothing that interested her.

Then she turned it over and pursued her search on the other side.

And soon her eye was caught by a deep pen and ink mark, inclosing a very short paragraph in very fine print.

"That is it! some compliment to the Duke, that the good son liked and wished me to see," she said, with a smile, as she folded the paper to a convenient form and looked at the paragraph.

But the smile fled from her face and the light from her eyes as she read:

"DIED—At Montcalla House, Kensington, April 3d, in the 20th year of his age, Donald Hugh, Earl of Cressy, eldest son of His Grace the Duke of Montcalla."

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CHAPTER VIII.

MUSA AND CASSY "GO A TRAVELLING."

MUSA neither spoke nor stirred, but gazed upon the fatal print as if it had been the fabled Medusa's head that had turned her into stone.

Old Cassy stared at her for some moments in mute terror, and then suddenly broke forth with:

"Miss Musa! Miss Musa! Oh! for goodness gracious sakes, honey, *don't* look that a-way! You scares me 'most to death!"

As the old nurse spoke, the paper slowly fell from the reader's relaxing hand, and Musa sank back on her pillow and fainted.

Quick as a flash old Cassy went and secured the door, and then returned to the bedside and used such means as her experience suggested to restore her charge to consciousness. Soon she was relieved by hearing her young mistress heave a deep sigh, and seeing her open her eyes and gaze around in some confusion.

"Is you better now, honey? I hopes you 's better," said Cassy sympathetically.

But Musa only stared at her in bewilderment, and passed her hand to and fro across her own perplexed brow, until her eyes lighted on the *Times*.

Then remembrance of the fatal news she had read returned to her, and with a stifled cry she covered her face with her hands.

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"Miss Musa, honey," said Cassy, bending over her.

"Hush! hush!" answered the new-made widow.

Cassy sat down and watched her in silence, while Musa struggled with her troubles alone.

"I hopes you didn't see no bad news in de paper, honey?" said Cassy cautiously, for she was half afraid of irritating her young mistress, in that lady's extremely excitable condition.

"Don't ask me any questions now, nurse. And don't say a word about what has happened in my room this morning. I will tell you everything by and by. For you are faithful. I can trust you, nurse. And I do not know that I can trust another human being," said Musa drearily.

"You kin truss me, honey; yes, you kin—that 's so," earnestly answered the old woman.

"Cassy, you and I will have to go travelling, as you once said."

"Yes, honey, so I 'spected, so I 'spected."

"We must start almost immediately, Cassy. And we will have to cross the ocean."

"Yes, honey, so I 'spected, so I 'spected."

"I shall take Servia with us. You may begin to get ready at once. But do not say to any one that we are going on a journey. Leave me to do that, when the proper time comes."

"Yes, honey. But now look here, Miss Musa; it 's now one o'clock in de arternoon. And to my sartain knowledge nuffin has passed your lips since tea-time yesterday. Now you jes' let me go and get somefin for you to eat and drink. 'Cause if you don't eat, nor likewise drink, how you going to have strength enough to go cross de high seas, arter de Early young gentleman?"

"After the Earl? Ah, Heaven! But you are quite

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right in one thing, Cassy. I must keep up my strength, if I can. You may go and get something for me."

"What will you have, honey?"

"I don't care. Don't ask me. Anything you please. But lock the door after you, and take the key with you, to protect me from intrusion while you are gone. I don't wish to be tormented with questions and offers from Mrs. Shrewsbury, or any one else," said Musa petulantly.

The old nurse quietly slipped out of the room, locking the door after her, as she had been directed to do.

Musa covered her face with her hands again, and relapsed into deep and troubled thought.

She was profoundly grieved for the death of her young husband, but she was even more profoundly anxious that he should have acknowledged their marriage before his death; for she knew now it was of vital importance to her that her real social position as Countess of Cressy should be recognized by the deceased Earl's family prior to the fact being announced to her own select circle of friends, and to the world at large.

She deeply regretted the fastidious pride that had prevented her from complying with her young husband's wishes, that she would consent to the announcement of their marriage in Washington, and then accompany him to England, to be presented as his bride to his family.

Better, she now thought it would have been, to have braved the indignation of the noble family, with her husband by her side, than to be obliged to go now, like a disreputable adventuress, alone, to claim recognition as his widow. For this last intended deed was what she was now driven to do.

But, oh! it was a wretched business, from which her very soul shrank.

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Suppose the Earl had never divulged his marriage? Suppose the Duke should repudiate her claims as the widow of his son, and subject her to the distress of a suit at law?

Ah, Heaven! The more she thought of it, the more bitterly she deplored the pride, obstinacy and recklessness with which she had resisted her true-hearted young husband's arguments, and persisted in her purpose of remaining behind until he should go over and reconcile his parents to his marriage, and induce them to invite his bride to their home.

She remembered how much more he always had thought of her welfare than of his own.

And then a feeling of gratitude for his earnest, devoted love, and of compassion for his early doom, mingled with her natural grief for his loss.

And how did he die? And what was the record of his last few weeks of life? Did he think of her at all? Did he speak of her to his family? Did he acknowledge her as his wife? Did he even have the opportunity of doing so?

He might have died suddenly by accident. Or he might have died of a fever, after lingering long in a state of unconsciousness.

The more she reflected upon the subject, the more she felt convinced that from some cause, for which his love was not responsible, he had passed away without divulging the secret of his marriage.

For if he *had* done so, and the family *had* learned from him that she was his wife, then some member of that family would have written to her to announce his illness, or his death, if he had died suddenly.

Her suspense was intolerable. She could not bear to

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wait a day longer than necessary to end this horrible uncertainty. She must sail by the first steamer that should leave New York for Liverpool.

She knew that the *Darien* was gazetted to sail again on the ensuing Saturday. And she then and there resolved that she would sail in the *Darien;* and, wind and weather permitting, would reach England within two weeks from the present time.

Certainly her sudden resolution to go on a sea voyage so soon, and with so little preparation, would shock her household and astonish her friends, especially as she should not explain to them the cause of her unexpected voyage; for she could not bring herself to divulge her private marriage to the late Earl, until she could be sure of recognition by his family as his widow. And to ward off the least chance of suspicion that any connection existed between the death of the Earl of Cressy and the fact of her suddenly determined journey to Europe, she resolved to suppress the news of that death.

Around and around in her brain these troubled thoughts revolved, until her mind seemed in a whirl.

Two strong resolutions, however, stood distinctly out from the confusion.

The first was, to go to England by the next steamer.

The second was, to keep her own secrets closely until she should get there.

Her half distraught mind was still going around and around in the same circle, when old Cassy unlocked the door and entered with the breakfast tray, which she set down on a side table while she relocked the door.

"You didn't tell me what you wanted, honey. You said you didn't care what I fotch. So I jes brought you some tea and toas', and a brile pidgin. Can't make no

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mistakes when I bring tea and toas', I reckon, and not many when I fetches brile pidgin nyther," said Cassy, as she placed a table beside her mistress' bed, and set the tray upon it.

Musa forced herself to eat and drink, and then to lie down quietly for half an hour, while Cassy removed the table and took the tray from the room.

When the old woman returned from this last service, her mistress said to her:

"Cassy, I think I shall get up and dress, and go downstairs to spend the afternoon and evening in the drawing-room with the ladies. I have to tell them that I am going to Europe by Saturday's steamer. It will give them all a great shock to hear it, and so I rather dread telling them; but the sooner it is over the better."

"Well, honey, I reckon that 's so. What dress will you have, honey—your rose-colored organdie as come home dis mornin' ?"

"No, Cassy. Lay out my black grenadine."

"De one wid de satin stripes, honey, trimmed wid Brushes lace ?"

"No; the plain black grenadine, with the bias folds."

"Lor', Miss Musa !"

"Do as I tell you, Cassy."

The old woman looked at her young mistress as Sancho Panza might have looked at Don Quixote, and sighed, but made no comment.

And half an hour later, Musa entered the drawing-room, and stood there dressed in black from head to foot.

The three ladies stared for a moment, but quickly recovered themselves. They were becoming accustomed to Musa's eccentricities.

Only Armida Sutton exclaimed:

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"Good gracious, Musa! Who's dead, that you stand before us in deep mourning?"

"Politeness, I think, is dead, Armida, or you would not ask me such a question in such a tone," coolly replied the lady, as she seated herself.

"I *beg* your pardon. It was an error of judgment in me to ask such a question. I might as well have asked you, on the occasion of your great party on the third of February, who was married, that you appeared in bridal white," sneered Armida.

"You are my guest, Miss Sutton. But I could almost wish that you stood in some other relation toward me, exacting something less of forbearance."

Armida bit her lips in silence. Perhaps she balanced in her own mind the comparative claims of pride, that goaded her to leave the house of her insulted benefactress, and of self-interest, that counselled her to remain where she was.

"Armida Sutton, you are an idiot, and a very unfeeling one into the bargain," whispered Clarice Shrewsbury, stung beyond the patience of her gentle nature on seeing her beloved Musa justly offended.

"Come, come, my dear girls, don't lose temper. We are all concerned at the evident indisposition of our dear Miss Percie, and of course it makes us all excitable where she is in question," said Mrs. Shrewsbury oracularly.

"I beg that no one will trouble herself about me at all," said Musa, reaching out her hand carelessly and taking up an evening paper.

"Ah!" exclaimed Armida, recovering herself with a rattle, as some snakes do—"but there is something there that will trouble *you*, for it has troubled us. Look at the foreign news."

Musa, setting her face immovably, looked at the foreign

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news. And after reading of the birth of this imperial prince and the marriage of that royal princess, the resignation of this minister and the appointment of his successor, the repeal of such a law and the passing of such an act, she read as follows :

"The London papers brought by the *Darien* record the death, at Montcalla Lodge, of the Earl of Cressy, eldest son and heir of the Duke of Montcalla. The news of the demise of this amiable and accomplished young nobleman will be received with sincere regret by the hosts of friends he made during his sojourn among us last winter."

Musa read the notice very calmly, and laid the paper down. It was well for her that she had seen the fatal news in the *Times*, some hours before, and that her mind was too full of the subject to be startled by any reference to it.

"Now, what do you think of that?" inquired Armida.

"I think it is a great pity he should have died so young. I feel very sorry; more sorry than I can well express," replied Musa, so truthfully as to astonish Armida, yet so calmly as to disarm suspicion.

"Armida, my dear, I must really entreat you not to call Miss Percie's attention to any agitating subject," said Mrs. Shrewsbury emphatically; adding, "We are all sorry to hear of the death of Lord Cressy. He was a very agreeable young man, and will be very much lamented. But let us talk of something else."

"Of anything else you please, Mrs. Shrewsbury. I have been peculiarly unfortunate in my selection of subjects," said Miss Sutton.

"Musa, my dear, I think it my solemn duty to speak to you about your health. Don't be alarmed, however. I do not mean to hint that you are dangerously ill, but you are seriously indisposed, and you should take some measures

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for the restoration of your health and strength," said Mrs. Shrewsbury very gravely.

"I appreciate your advice, Madam, and I thank you. I feel the need of a change, and I shall very soon take one," replied Musa.

"Do, my dear. Go down to Richmond and spend a few weeks with Kate Carew. And then, when the season is more advanced, go down to Pirate's Peak. The air there is very bracing, and the sea bathing unrivalled."

"I dare say, Mrs. Shrewsbury; but I have formed a different plan for the summer. I shall go to Europe."

"To Europe!" echoed Mrs. Shrewsbury.

"To Europe!" re-echoed the young ladies.

"To Europe," repeated Musa.

"That is a very sudden resolution," said Armida Sutton meaningly.

"No, it is not so. I have thought of going to Europe for some time," calmly replied Musa.

"About when do you expect to go? Now, June is a good month in which to cross the ocean, and as this is the twenty-second of April, you would have five or six weeks in which to prepare for your voyage. I suppose you will go in June."

Musa looked from one to the other of her companions, and then, with a little bit of malice, she answered slowly:

"To-morrow I shall have a small trunk packed with only such effects as I may need on the voyage. The next day, attended by my two servants, I shall start for New York. And on Saturday morning we shall sail for Europe."

No one answered her. All gazed on her in silent astonishment. She continued:

"I shall leave the household just as it is, in Mrs. Shrews-

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bury's care; and I hope that you will all continue to make it your home. If any of you wish to accept Colonel Carew's invitation to spend the heated term of the summer at Pirate's Peak, of course you will do so; but I hope, at the end of your visit, that you will return here as to your home. Or if, ladies, you should all wish to go off at the same time, you can of course shut up the house and leave it in the care of the servants until your return," she added, speaking with careful consideration of their feelings and interests.

"But, Musa! You have taken our breaths away! Go to Europe on Saturday!" exclaimed Mrs. Shrewsbury, recovering from her dumbness, but not from her amazement.

"I go on Saturday, by the *Darien*," said Musa, with a quiet smile.

And go she did, taking Cassy and Servia with her. She had a pleasant voyage, and on arriving in Liverpool she procured a supply of clothing befitting her state and station. She took a night train for London, where she arrived early the next morning and went to the Victoria Hotel.

Musa engaged the best suite of rooms then at the disposal of the landlady, and ordered breakfast to be served as soon as possible.

Meanwhile she directed Cassy to unpack her trunks and lay her new dress out.

And Musa herself looked over and selected some of Lord Cressy's letters to herself, to take with her when she should go to call on his father and mother.

As soon as her breakfast was over, she began to prepare for that visit.

She dressed herself in the new lustreless black silk, with the deep crape folds and the deep crape mantle. She put on the crape bonnet, with the pretty widow's cap and the long crape veil.

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In all the splendor of costume that she had affected in her happier days, she had never looked more grandly beautiful than in this sombre dress. Her beauty shone from its darkness like a star from the night sky.

When she was quite ready, she entered the handsome plain dark coach that she had ordered from the livery stable, and directed the coachman to drive to Montcalla Lodge, Kensington.

As the carriage rolled rapidly onward, taking her to meet her fate, her suspense and anxiety became intense, intolerable. It blanched her face, and almost palsied her frame.

And before she could rally her fainting spirits to overcome this weakness, the carriage drew up before Montcalla Lodge.

Montcalla Lodge was a huge dark gray edifice, of one square building, with wings each side. It stood upon a terrace, approached by a flight of stone steps, and it was separated from the sidewalk by a stone-wall topped by an iron railing.

Musa's heart seemed to stand still, as she alighted from the carriage and walked through the iron gateway up the stone steps leading to the repellant looking house above.

She had intended to ask for the Duke of Montcalla, but when she reached the heavy doors her heart failed her, and she thought she would ask for Lord Gilbert Caux, her old acquaintance.

Good-natured "Bertie" would be glad to see her, she hoped, whether he knew of her marriage with his late brother or not. And under no circumstances would he treat her with coldness or distrust, or in any way wound her feelings.

Yes, she would ask for Lord Gilbert, and when she

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should see him, she would tell him of her marriage, if he did not know of it already, and she would ask him to break the news to his parents, and then to present her to them.

This resolution gave her so much courage, that she advanced and knocked.

The broad doors swung open as by magic, and a tall footman, in the gray and black livery of the Duke, stood before the visitor.

"Is Lord Gilbert Caux at home?" inquired Musa.

"I will see, Madam. What name?" in his turn, inquired the footman.

Musa paused a moment for reflection. Then she drew a deep black-edged card from her card case, and wrote upon it in pencil:

"An American woman, whom Lord Gilbert Caux knew as Musa Percie, begs to see his lordship for a few moments on business."

She handed this to the footman.

"Walk in, Madam," said the man, leading the way.

Musa entered, and found herself in a lofty stone hall, very grand, very spacious, and with a broad staircase ascending until it was lost in the shadows above.

"This way, Madam, if you please," said the footman, leading the way up-stairs. He opened the nearest door at the head of the landing, and bowed as he held it open for her to pass in.

She entered a large, sombre, and rather dingy room, where walls, ceiling, carpet, window curtains, chairs, and sofas, were all of shaded brown. She sat down to wait while the servant took up her card.

And the next moment Lord Gilbert Caux, or, as we must now call him, the new Earl of Cressy, entered the room.

He was in deep mourning, and the gravity of his coun-

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tenance so much increased his likeness to his brother, that the first effect was quite startling.

Musa could almost have imagined that her husband stood before her. She caught her breath. It required all her self-command to repress a burst of tears.

"My *dear* Miss Percie!" said the young lord, in a tone of respectful tenderness, as his eyes fell upon *her* deep mourning dress, and he came toward her with extended hands.

His first words told her all. "My dear Miss Percie," he had said. He did not know of her marriage then!

She arose to meet his offered greeting, and at the same moment he saw that she wore a widow's cap.

He was taken off his guard, and for an instant looked surprised; but immediately recovered himself, and said, in reverential sympathy:

"I beg your pardon, Madam. I did not know. But—will you be seated again?"

She sank back into the chair. Every look, every tone, every movement of this young nobleman brought back her husband's image so vividly that she could hardly keep down her emotion.

He sat down gravely before her, and seemed to wait for her to explain at her own convenience.

"No, you did not know; although I had hoped that you had been told of my marriage, and therefore knew of my widowhood," answered Musa in a broken voice.

"I grieve to hear it now—your widowhood I mean; and I long to serve you, if in any way I can do so," replied the young lord, in a tone of sincere and respectful compassion, that went at once to the heart of the troubled visitor.

"I have always confided in your kindness, and I thank you, Lord Gilbert—I mean Lord Cressy," she said, correcting herself with some emotion.

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"No, no, never mind! Pray call me by my own old name. The severe bereavement through which I gained the new title makes me almost hate it. I have lost—my brother—you know—of course," answered the young Earl, in a choking voice.

"I know—I know," faintly faltered Musa. "But if—if it is not too painful to you, pray, pray tell me the circumstances that led to his death. I know nothing but what the paper told me. *You* sent me the paper which contained the notice of his death, I presume?"

"Yes, I sent it; I did not know that you had so deep a sorrow of your own to bear, or I should not have troubled you with the knowledge of ours."

"Our sorrow is a common one, Lord Gilbert. You know, do you not, that your late brother and myself were very dear friends?" said Musa, tearfully.

"I know that poor Cressy admired and esteemed you above all women," gravely replied the young Earl.

"He did more than that—*he loved me*," murmured Musa with a suppressed sob.

"Perhaps, perhaps," said the young Earl gently and hesitatingly—"perhaps you were betrothed?"

"Yes, we were betrothed," murmured Musa in a very low voice.

He looked at her mourning dress and wondered how it could have been that she was betrothed to his late brother, and married and widowed so soon after his death. And the next instant the truth flashed upon him and nearly took away his breath.

But he was determined not to surprise her confidence, or even to hasten it, but to wait quietly until she should give it to him at her own leisure, and without reserve, as he felt very sure she would.

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"I am not surprised to hear what you have just told me; for I know that my brother was very strongly attached to you," he said, in a voice of forced calmness.

"Then you will not hesitate, I hope, to give me the particulars of his last illness, unless it would give you too much pain to recall them," said Musa, with a similar self-restraint.

"I do not need to 'recall' his last days. They are ever present with me. It can make no difference to me to speak of them. My brother was my inseparable companion from my earliest infancy till the hour of his death. There was but a year's difference in our age. I feel as if one half of my own life had left me," sighed the young lord.

"Was he ill long?" softly inquired Musa, to bring him to the point.

"Not very long. He arrived at home seemingly in perfect health. He passed one pleasant evening in the drawing-room, where all the family were assembled, with no strangers present. My father, being still an invalid, was the first to retire. We, not liking to lose sight of him so soon, attended him to his dressing-room, and bade him good-night there. Before my brother left him, however, he asked our father for the favor of a private interview the next morning; and the Duke consented, telling Cressy to come to him in his own room at ten in the forenoon. Madam, you may judge that interview never came off. If it had, we should have been prepared to receive you," said Bertie regretfully.

Musa sighed in silence. He continued:

"My brother shivered as he left me, and laughingly complained of our damp and chilly springs as compared with those of America. I thought nothing of his shiverings at the time. I entered my room and he passed on to his own.

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But it seems that while he was undressing, his chill increased so much that he went to bed with a shaking ague. But he would not allow any one to be disturbed, not even the housekeeper. His valet sat up with him. After midnight his chill went off, and the fever came on soon with great violence. Still, so long as he had any self-command, he would not allow any one to be disturbed. But the fever rose to delirium; and Robins the valet, in great alarm, roused up Mrs. Pouncet the housekeeper, who, as soon as she saw Cressy, dispatched a messenger for our family physician, Dr. Cardigan, and sent Robins to call me. I went immediately to my brother's room, and found him tossing in delirium. When Dr. Cardigan arrived, he immediately administered some powerful sedative to the patient; and directed that the Duke and Duchess should be called, though it was then but four o'clock in the morning. I could make nothing of Dr. Cardigan's face. But from that last order he gave, I judged how gravely he thought of the case. Happily, when my father and mother came into the room, my brother's excitement had yielded to the sedative. He never recovered his consciousness; yet my father and mother hoped against hope to the very last. Then disappointment and despair nearly killed them both. My father has never been like himself since. My mother has not left her room. This is truly a house of mourning to which you have come. And yet," said Bertie, regarding her with an expression of respectful sympathy—"and yet I fear that upon you the blow has fallen heaviest of all."

"Heaven only knows how heavily it has fallen upon me!" moaned Musa.

And then she hesitated, while her face flushed and paled, and he regarded her more wistfully and tenderly than before.

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"You have something to tell me more than you have yet told. You—dear Madam, you may tell anything you please, as to—*a brother,*" he added gently.

"And as to a brother I will speak to you. I told you that I was the betrothed of the late Earl. I was, and I am, much more than that: I was his wife—I am his widow. You are shocked to hear this," she added, coloring vividly.

"Not in the least," he answered quietly. "I was prepared to hear it. I wish that Cressy had married you openly, however. It was not like him to do otherwise."

"Do not blame him. The fault, the folly, was mine. I would not consent to defy the opposition of his family by a public marriage. On the contrary, I consented to become his wife only on the condition that our marriage should be kept a secret until he should win the consent of the Duke and Duchess to receive me as their daughter-in-law. It was a fatal mistake," sighed Musa.

"It was a mistake; but not a fatal one, I hope. I wish that you could see my mother, and tell her the whole story of your marriage with my brother. She idolized that first-born son of hers. And certainly, if any human being ever merited or excused idolatry, it was Cressy. He was the very soul of honor and of affection. Yes, my mother idolized him, and her love would go forth *now*, I know, to any one *he* loved. I wish that you could see and speak with her," said Bertie thoughtfully.

"And can I not?" inquired Musa, whose heart hungered for womanly and motherly sympathy.

"Ah, no—at least not now; not without some preparation on her part. My mother has kept her room since the death of my brother. She is under medical treatment for heart disease, and she is closely protected from all agitation

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or excitement. In a few days, after due preparation, I hope she will be able to receive you, and to take comfort from your presence."

"Heaven grant it!" fervently breathed Musa.

"And now, my sister, if I can at once serve you in any way, I shall be glad to do so," said the amiable young man.

"Thanks, my lord——"

"Bertie, Bertie, with *you*. Cressy never called me anything but Bertie, *to* you," said the young lord, interrupting her, with a gentle smile.

"Thanks then, Bertie—thanks, good brother. Ah, how strange and sweet that name 'brother' sounds! I never had brother or sister, never knew father or mother. My life has been strangely destitute of family ties," said Musa sadly.

"I hope it will be so no longer; you have already a brother in me. You will find dear sisters in Cressy's sisters, a mother in Cressy's mother, and a father in his father," said Bertie earnestly.

"Heaven grant that also!" fervently prayed the young widow.

"But you were about to tell me what I could do for you now, immediately."

"Thanks. I only wish you, if you will be so kind, to break the news of my marriage with the late Lord Cressy to the Duke, and afterward, if he will permit you, to present me to his Grace. Can you do so, this morning?" she asked.

"Certainly; assuredly. It is my place to do so. Before you mentioned it, I had intended to ask your leave to do so."

"You are very good to me."

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"I am your brother. But to our purpose. The Duke has not gone out yet. If you will sit here, I will see him at once, tell him all, and bring him to you," said the young lord, rising and touching the bell.

"Thanks, dear Bertie," replied Musa.

As the young Earl left the room, he met the footman who answered the summons, gave an order in a low voice, and passed on.

Musa sat waiting in terrible suspense, and growing fainter and more faint as the moments crept by.

Presently she started as the door swung open. But there was only the footman, bringing in a small silver waiter upon which stood a cut glass decanter of sherry wine, a wine glass, and a plate of delicate biscuits.

He set the waiter down on a stand beside the lady, poured out a glass of wine, bowed respectfully, and withdrew from the room.

Musa took the wine. Her failing nerves seemed to require it, and she inwardly thanked "Bertie" for his thoughtful kindness.

Time passed on, and she began momentarily to expect the appearance of the Duke.

She had formed in her own mind a complete picture of her father-in-law, England's great statesman, the Duke of Montcalla. She believed that she would know him, if she were to meet him unawares anywhere. She judged him from his two sons, whom she had known so well.

They were both tall, fair, rosy, blue-eyed and flaxen-haired young men, who resembled each other so closely that she thought they must resemble their father also—as much, at least, as youths of nineteen and twenty could resemble a man of perhaps fifty-five or sixty. And in the Duke of Montcalla she pictured to herself a tall, stately,

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fair, gray-haired man of dignified presence and courtly address.

That was what she imagined. *This* was what she saw: An iron statue of a man standing about four feet from her —or what might have been an iron statue, for the darkness, the hardness and the stillness of the figure.

He had come so silently that she had neither heard nor seen, nor in any way perceived his presence until he stood, still and dark, before her—a man of middle height, compactly built, and dressed in deep mourning, with a round head covered with closely clipped iron-gray hair, a hard, sallow face, with heavy eyebrows, dull black eyes, firm-set mouth, and chin covered with a neglected iron-gray stubble beard.

Musa looked at him for a moment in dismay. She could not recognize the handsome, stately old gentleman she had pictured as the Duke of Montcalla, in this dark, still, hard, repellant figure. And perhaps, after all, he might not be the Duke, but some messenger.

She bowed slightly, and waited for him to speak.

But he did not open those firm-set lips.

Thus the beginning of the interview was forced upon herself.

"I am waiting here to see the Duke of Montcalla," she said, with what grace she could.

"You see him, Madam," returned the statue.

"Oh, I beg pardon. I had expected that Lord Cressy would have returned here and presented me to your Grace," said Musa, as she arose and courtesied.

"Lord Cressy is with the Duchess, Madam."

Musa dropped into her seat again. She was utterly confused and abashed by this reception. She did not know what next to say.

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Nor would the iron statue help her in the least. He had not moved a muscle since he stood there. His monotonous words had seemed to drop from motionless lips.

At length, with an effort, Musa forced herself to speak again:

"I hope, at least, Lord Cressy has advised your Grace of the motives that have brought me to England and to your house."

"He has," said the statue, and he said no more.

Musa began to feel hysterical, and to wish herself three thousand miles away. But she compelled herself to say:

"He has told you, sir, that I am the widow of your son."

"He has told me that you profess to be so."

"Your Grace!" exclaimed Musa indignantly.

"I cannot, of course, recognize you as such."

"Duke of Montcalla," began the lady, rising, with flashing eyes and burning cheeks.

"If you fancy that you have any claims upon my family, and any proof to support such claims, I refer you to my solicitors, Messrs. Coke & Coke, of the Inner Temple. I leave all such matters to my solicitors," said the iron statue, without moving its lips.

"Sir, this is a wanton insult offered to your dead son's widow," said Musa bitterly.

"I refer you to my solicitors," ticked this iron machine.

"This is unworthy of you—unworthy of your order, Duke of Montcalla," said Musa, with dignity.

"I refer you to my solicitors."

"I am grieved that you should treat me in this way, because I know that you also will be grieved when you discover how much you have mistaken me, and how deeply you have wronged me."

"I refer you to my solicitors."

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"Good-morning, your Grace," said Musa, rising to leave the house.

The Duke touched the bell.

A footman entered.

"I refer you to my solicitors. Good-morning, Madam. John, show this lady to her carriage."

Musa bowed, turned and left the room, with the iron statue standing still in the midst of it.

She went down-stairs, respectfully attended by the footman, who opened the great hall doors for her to pass out.

"I breathe again! I breathe again!" she said to herself, when she had gained the open air.

The footman passed before her, opened the carriage door, let down the steps, and stood waiting to see her in.

"Where shall I order the coachman to drive, Madam?" he inquired.

"Back to the Victoria Hotel," answered the lady.

The man shut the door, and gave the order.

And the carriage drove off. And Musa left Montcalla Lodge behind her, feeling that she never wished to see it again.

As soon as she reached the hotel, Musa hurried to her own room, and without stopping to take off her bonnet or mantle, she sat down to her writing-table and dashed off a hasty note to the new Earl of Cressy, merely saying:

"For Heaven's sake, good Bertie, come to me this afternoon if possible, and explain to me, if you can, the strange and cruel treatment I have received from the Duke of Montcalla."

Before she could hope for a response to her note, there came a rap at her door, and she received a card which bore the name and title of—

"Lord Gilbert Caux."

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"Ah! generous and gentle heart!" said Musa to herself, as she read this. "He *is* the Earl of Cressy, yet with tender consideration he sends up the old name."

In a few minutes the new Earl of Cressy entered the room and Musa arose and went to meet him.

"Thanks, for coming so soon," she said, offering her hand.

"My *dear* Lady Cressy," he said, with reverential tenderness, as he took her proffered hand and pressed it. "My *dear* Lady Cressy, your note surprised and grieved me, and of course I came to you at once. Your note called for an explanation from me, while, indeed, I think it requires one from you. You tell me of your 'strange and cruel' reception by my father."

"Yes," said Musa; "but take a seat, Lord Cressy."

"Bertie, you mean," said the young Earl, smiling.

"Sit down then, dear Bertie."

"Now then I am seated, and all attention, Lady Cressy."

"Musa, you mean," said the lady archly, parodying his own words.

"Musa, my dear sister, I attend you," he answered.

"In the very first place, then, I was disappointed and embarrassed at not seeing you with your father. I had hoped and expected that you would have presented me to him."

"I had hoped and intended to do so, but was prevented."

"Will you tell me what passed between yourself and your father on the subject of his son's marriage with me?"

"Certainly. When I left you and went to my father in the library, I gradually approached the subject of your marriage. First I referred to my brother's strong attach-

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ment to you, with which the Duke had already been made acquainted by letters from Cressy himself."

"Yes, I knew that."

"Next I told him of your high social position in your own country, making him understand that you were one of the idols of society in Washington. Then—forgive me—I told him of your great wealth, for that is always a consideration with men past fifty. Finally I informed him of the private marriage solemnized between yourself and my brother Cressy."

"How did he receive the intelligence?" inquired Musa, perceiving that he hesitated.

"Very quietly," answered the young Earl.

"Yes, I should think he would receive a thunderbolt very quietly," commented Musa.

"He asked me if *I* had been present at or privy to this marriage. I replied that I had not. That I knew nothing about it until this morning, when I heard it for the first time from your lips. But I added that I could not but approve of my brother's choice, and again spoke of you in terms that—I need not repeat here."

"No," said Musa, blushing. "But thanks, Bertie, many thanks for your great kindness to me. Go on, please."

"Finally I proposed to bring him to you, and to introduce him; but he peremptorily declined my proposal, and added, 'I can introduce myself to this lady.'"

"And he did," said Musa, with a bitter recollection of her interview with the Duke.

"At the same moment also, a servant came with a message from my mother, requiring my presence in her chamber. And I went immediately; for since my brother's death I am the only one who can soothe my mother in her

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worst nervous sufferings. I suppose it is because I so much resemble my brother, and because we were always such inseparable companions. Cressy and myself not only resembled each other, but resembled our mother also. All the rest of the boys are blackamoors like our father. You must know, Lady Cressy, that there is a streak of African blood in our veins, little as you would think it. My father's grandmother was a Spanish Countess, and *her* great-grandmother was a Moorish Princess. And you see yourself how the black blood crops out in my father. I am afraid we would hardly pass current in your country. But this is nothing to the purpose. I merely wished to explain how it was that I did not attend the Duke when he came to see you. Now, dear sister, tell me what he said or did to distress you."

"He stood before me more like an iron image than a living man. He left me to introduce myself. And then in a few curt words, that fell from his lips like bullets from a mould, he declined to recognize me as the widow of his son, and told me coldly, that if I thought I had any claims upon his family, I must go to his solicitors; that he left all such matters to his solicitors. And to every word I afterward spoke to him he made but this monotonous answer: 'I refer you to my solicitors.' At length, feeling outraged and disheartened, I arose to leave the house. He rang the bell, and directed the footman who answered it to see me to my carriage. And so the painful interview ended. And now, my good Bertie, I am in great trouble in this matter of my marriage. I am indeed. It is vitally necessary that I should be recognized as the widow of your brother. What would you counsel me to do?"

"Heaven knows; I cannot tell you yet. I must know all the details of that private marriage ceremony; when

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and where, and by whom it was solemnized; and I must have time to think it all over, before I can give you any counsel that will be worth your taking," gravely replied the young Earl.

"In the meantime shall I follow your father's sardonic directions, and go to his solicitors?"

"By no means. You would only be hurt again. They are not gentlemen, Musa. They are hard-headed legal drudges. Do not go near them until you have collected a mass of proof that shall convince them of your right to be recognized as the widow of the late Earl of Cressy; and then go, not in person, but through your *own solicitors.*"

"I will. But my solicitor, who was once my guardian and trustee, and is now the legal steward of my estates, is in Washington City. Why, *you* know him—Mr. Lyttleton Locke."

"Of course I do. Was *he* privy to the marriage?"

"No; he knew nothing about it."

"That is a pity. But he knows a great deal about you and your fortunes, and your acquaintance with my brother. He is the very man for your business. Write to him by the first mail, and instruct him to collect proofs of your marriage, and bring them over here as soon as possible. It is your duty as well as your interest to establish this marriage; and when you shall have done so, it will be my father's duty to recognize it. And he will do his duty. He has of late shown himself as a hard man; but he never will be an unjust one. I suppose the collection of evidence will take some little time. But in any case I should think that in about five or six weeks Mr. Lyttleton Locke might be in London ready for action, with every document necessary to establish your claims. You must try to wait patiently, Musa, my good sister."

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"I cannot wait patiently, Bertie. I cannot wait at all. I am in too great a fever of anxiety to be still. I will return immediately to America, and put my affairs into the hands of my late guardian and present solicitor, Mr. Lyttleton Locke. That will be the quickest way. Letters might miscarry. Delays might occur. I, waiting here, could not endure the suspense. I shall return to America by the next steamer, tell the whole story to Mr. Locke, aid him in collecting proofs, and then we will come back here together, prepared to—see the Duke's solicitor," concluded Musa, with a singular smile.

"I am sorry to hear that you will leave England so soon. I wish it were not necessary, yet I can see clearly that it is the best course you can take. And indeed, if it were not for my mother's precarious health, I would myself accompany you back to Washington," said the young Lord Cressy affectionately.

"Thanks, dear Bertie. Your goodness to me has won my everlasting gratitude."

"When do you propose to return to America?"

"By the next steamer, if it be possible to get passage."

"This is Thursday. There is a steamer sails from Liverpool to New York every Saturday, and from Southampton to Boston every Wednesday."

"I will go in the Saturday's steamer, if it be possible. If not, then in the Wednesday's."

"Let us get a copy of the *Times* and see what there is," said Bertie, rising and ringing the bell.

"Bring me this morning's *Times*," he said, to the waiter who answered the summons.

"The *Suez* sails from Liverpool for New York at eight o'clock on Saturday morning," said the young Earl, reading from the paper that was brought him.

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"That is my steamer, if I can get a passage on her. And sooner than wait four days longer, I would even take a steerage passage," said Musa eagerly.

Thanks to Bertie's devotion, two state-rooms were procured on the *Suez*, and on the following Saturday Musa and her servants set sail for home.

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CHAPTER IX.

WHAT HAPPENED NEXT.

MUSA'S voyage home was even pleasanter, though rather longer, than her voyage out.

Clear skies, fair winds and calm seas attended the whole passage from England to America.

The steamship arrived at New York on the evening of the fifteenth of May.

It was too late for Musa and her attendants to go on to Washington that night. But the next morning she took the first train for the South, and reached Washington at an early hour in the afternoon.

She called a hack, and drove directly to her house on Vermont Avenue.

When the hack drew up before the front door, she noticed that the house was closely shut up, as if it were deserted or untenanted.

"Get out, Cassy, and ring. I wonder if there is any one inside," said Musa, gazing wistfully at the silent and forsaken looking house.

Cassy alighted and went up the white marble steps that led from the pavement to the front door, where she first rang a peal of bells and then rapped an alarum. John, the footman, opened the door, and seeing the face of his young mistress at the carriage window, hastened out to open the door and let down the steps.

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"How do you do, John? Are you all well at home?" kindly inquired Musa as she stepped from the carriage.

"All mighty well, Miss, I thank you. Nobody here but me and de cook," replied the footman, with a bow and a grin. "All started off together last Saturday, Miss."

"Where have they gone, John?" pursued Musa, as she threw off her bonnet and mantle and tossed them over on the nearest table.

"Madam and Miss have gone down to Pirit's Peak, to stay three month 'long o' de Colonel C'rews. And Miss Meda Suttin have gone home to her mother."

"I am glad to hear it. It will do them all good. Now, John, go and open the windows in the library, and air the room, and lay out some paper and pens and ink on the writing table. And be quick, for I shall follow you almost immediately," said the lady.

John hurried away to obey her orders.

In a few moments Musa left the drawing-room and passed on to the library, where she sat down at the writing table and dashed off the following note:

"VERMONT AVENUE, Wednesday Evening.

"TO LYTTLETON LOCKE, ESQ.—*My Dear Guardian:* As I love still to call you. I have returned home suddenly and unexpectedly, even to myself. Business of the most vital importance has hurried me hither. I want your advice immediately. Pray come to me this evening if possible. If not, come at your earliest convenience. I shall stay home and wait until I see you. Your affectionate ward, as I love still to consider myself. MUSA."

She folded, sealed and directed the note, and gave it to the waiting footman, saying:

"Take this immediately to Mr. Lyttleton Locke, John, and wait for an answer. Let me see. You had better

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take my saddle horse from the stable and ride him, to save time; and get back as quickly as possible."

Meanwhile old Cassy, having arranged with the cook to get up a nice little dinner in the shortest possible time, went up-stairs to her mistress' luxurious private apartments, to see if Servia were doing her duty there.

She found the rooms well aired and in perfect order, and the lady's maid engaged in laying out a change of dress for her mistress. Among other articles she laid out a rose-colored organdie muslin.

"Now you jes' will put dat dere back ag'in. Don't you know as Miss Musa an't wored nuffin but black for dis five weeks pas'? You jes' put dat 'way ag'in, and lay out dat plain black grenadine as she wored de last thing fore we all went to furrin parts——"

Cassy was interrupted by the entrance of her young mistress.

"Is my bath ready?" inquired the lady.

"Yes, Miss Musa, and ebery fing else besides all ready," answered Servia.

"Then you and your mother can go down. I can wait on myself," said Musa.

Half an hour later Musa came down-stairs, refreshed by her bath and change of dress, and looking pale, but very beautiful, in her plain black grenadine, with white linen cuffs and collar.

The dinner was ready to be served; and John had just returned, and was waiting to deliver to her a note from her ex-guardian.

Musa took it and read:

"The Poplars, Wednesday Afternoon.

"My Dear Musa: I will be with you this evening. Ever your friend, J. Lyttleton Locke."

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Immediately after dinner Musa went into the library to await the arrival of Mr. Locke, and in about fifteen minutes more he was announced, and entered her presence.

She arose and went forward to meet him.

"My dear guardian, I thank you so much for coming to me so promptly."

"Well, my dear Musa, I am very happy to welcome you home," he said, as he shook hands with her, and led her back to her seat.

Musa at once plunged into the distressing subject which weighed upon her mind. She succinctly stated the case to the old lawyer, who had hard work to conceal his amazement, and ended by saying:

"Mr. Locke, I wish you to collect the proofs of my marriage with the late Earl of Cressy, accompany me to England, and lay these proofs before the Duke's solicitors. They cannot resist proofs. And the Duke must then recognize me as the Countess of Cressy. Will you do this for me, Mr. Locke?"

"Certainly, Musa; and it fortunately so happens that I am sufficiently at leisure now, in the interim between the terms of courts, as to be able to devote my whole attention to your affairs for the next few weeks. But we must go to work at once. Will you show me the officiating minister's certificate of your marriage?"

"I—don't think I've got one. I—I'm *sure* I haven't," replied Musa reflectively.

"Eh!" exclaimed the lawyer, staring.

"I have no certificate of my marriage; I did not know it was usual or necessary to have one," replied Musa in a disturbed manner.

"What! did not the officiating clergyman sign a paper and hand it to you?" inquired the troubled lawyer.

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"No. Stop, let me think for a moment. Yes, there was a paper signed and handed to me. I gave it to Lord Cressy, and he thrust it into his vest pocket. I had forgotten all about it."

"As if it had been an old baggage check or railway ticket! Oh, you insane woman! It was handed to you. Why did you not keep it?" inquired the lawyer in a troubled voice.

"To tell you the truth, I did not know what it was. I thought it was some trifle—perhaps a receipt for the fee, or something of that sort."

The lawyer could have laughed at her simplicity had he not been so troubled on her account.

"Clergymen never give receipts for marriage fees, nor do bridegrooms ever expect them, you inexperienced girl," he grimly remarked.

"Was that paper of much importance, Mr. Locke?" anxiously inquired Musa.

"Of much importance? It was your marriage certificate, Musa. It was given to *you* to keep. It is always given to the bride, who is supposed to be even more deeply interested in the stability of her marriage than is the bridegroom," gravely replied the lawyer.

"Was that paper *so very* important?" again inquired Musa, more anxiously than before.

"Yes, it was very important, as matters have turned out. We *may* be able to do without it, however. Who was the officiating clergyman?"

"The Episcopal minister at Bladensburg."

"Ah, yes. I know him. We will drive out there to-morrow morning and get another certificate from him, and a copy of the registry."

The next morning Musa and Mr. Locke started on their

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quest. An hour's drive over a beautiful road running through fine undulating hills and valleys and bits of forest land, brought them at last to the little old village of Bladensburg, famous only for the battle fought there between the American and British forces, in our second war with England.

They passed through the old battle-field and burial-ground, and entered the village, and drew up before the little comfortable hotel.

"We will leave the carriage here, Musa, and you and I will walk to the rectory. It is near the church, as of course you must know," said the lawyer, as he alighted and held out his hand to assist Musa to do the same.

"I follow you in blind faith, Mr. Locke, for indeed I do not know why we might not drive up to the rectory," replied Musa, as, after leaving the carriage, she took the offered arm of the lawyer.

"One reason, Musa, is that I do not wish the coachman and the rectory servants to have any opportunity of asking each other questions and comparing notes. We must be very cautious, Musa, until your marriage is fully proved," gravely replied the lawyer.

A short walk brought them to the rectory gate.

"Is this the house, now, where you were married?" inquired the lawyer, pausing for her answer before he knocked.

"Why, of course it is the house," fretfully answered Musa.

"You are quite sure?"

"'Quite sure?' Now, Mr. Locke, do you take me for an infant, or for an idiot?"

"For neither, my dear Musa; but let me tell you that men, women and sages are all liable to mistakes."

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"Not in affairs of this kind. I know this is the house, Mr. Locke."

"Very well, then I will knock," said the lawyer, suiting the action to the word.

A pretty mulatto waitress came to the door.

"Is the rector at home?" inquired Mr. Locke.

"Yes, sir. Please to walk in," answered the girl, staring hard at the lady in black as she spoke, but afterward quickly remembering good manners, and leading the way into the parlor, which at this moment was vacant and dark.

"The very girl that admitted the Earl and myself on the third of February last," whispered Musa.

"Ah!" nodded the lawyer.

"Please to sit down here, sir. Please sit down, Miss," said the waitress, placing two chairs for the visitors, and then opening the closed window shutter and admitting the light.

"What name shall I give, sir?" inquired the girl.

"Take this card," said Mr. Lyttleton Locke, tendering the little slip of pasteboard that bore his name.

"The very girl that admitted the Earl and myself on that eventful third of February, and the very room in which we waited, and in which we were married," whispered Musa, as soon as the waitress had left.

At that moment the door opened, and a tall, dark-haired gentleman of about thirty-five years of age entered the room, and advanced cordially toward Mr. Locke, who arose and shook hands with him, and then presented him to Musa, saying:

"Lady Cressy, Mr. Mortimer. My dear, Mr. Mortimer, the rector of the church. But of course you have met before," he added, with a smile.

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"Never!" exclaimed Musa, whose very lips had turned ashen pale.

"I have never had the honor of seeing this lady before. But I am very glad to see her now," said the rector, offering his hand.

Musa scarcely touched it, and sank back in her chair, white and faint.

"Martha, a glass of water, quick!" exclaimed the rector, hurrying to the door.

"Musa! Musa! for Heaven's sake, command yourself!" whispered the lawyer. And he picked her pocket of her smelling salts and applied it to her nose.

"He is not the man who performed the ceremony. And yet he is the rector of the church. And this is the room where the ceremony was performed. Oh, am I indeed mad?" she wildly muttered in low, half-smothered tones.

"No, no, Musa; there is some mistake, which may be explained when you compare notes together."

At that moment the rector returned with a glass of water, which he brought to his visitor.

Musa thanked him, swallowed a little, and set the glass down on a table beside her.

The rector looked from one to the other of his visitors as in mute inquiry for an explanation, and then seated himself before them. Mr. Locke said:

"This lady is certain that she was married to the Earl of Cressy in this house, and even in this room, on the third of last February. She was also under the impression that she was married by the rector of this church. Therefore, when she saw you, and saw that you are not the minister who officiated on that occasion, the shock was very great. But I think I can understand the solution of

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the problem. You had probably gone from home for a season, and some substitute was filling your place. Was not such the case?" inquired the lawyer.

The rector reflected for a moment, while Musa looked breathlessly in his face.

"No," he answered slowly, at length. "The only occasion on which I have been absent from my duties was on the last Sunday in January, when I exchanged pulpits with the Rev. Mr. Jones of Washington, and on the last Sunday in April, when I was called to the happy death-bed of my sainted father.—Ah!"

The minister concluded with a sudden exclamation and look of enlightenment.

"My dear Lady Cressy," he said, "I think I have found a clue to this little mystery."

"Ah! I thought we should. Some brother clergyman was staying with you at the time," said the lawyer triumphantly.

Musa gazed and listened anxiously.

"Yes, Mr. Locke, you are right. My aged father, who was himself a clergyman, though long disabled from preaching, on account of his years and infirmities, spent the whole winter with me, for the sake of being in a warmer climate. He remained with me from the first of November until the first of April. He was not accustomed to perform any ministerial offices whatever. But it happened, some time in February, I was laid up for a few days with influenza, and my father was then able to walk about the house. It is most probable, as I was sick in bed at the time when you were married here in this parlor, that he officiated on the occasion; for he took great delight in marrying young couples. Now, my dear Lady Cressy, will you please to describe to me the personal appear-

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ance of the minister who performed that marriage ceremony?"

"He was a very tall old gentleman, with a fair, thin face and silvery white hair, and a long flowing silvery white beard. He had very fine light bright blue eyes that looked straight into those of any one he spoke to. And I noticed also that he wore a white casinet vest, which is unusual in the dress of a clergyman," added Musa.

"That was my father, even to the remarkable white vest that he always wore, and that I always considered as the outward sign of the inward purity. Yes, that was my father. You were married by Dr. Mortimer, Lady Cressy."

"But did he not tell you of this marriage, sir?" inquired the lawyer.

"No, not a word. My father was a very silent man; very much given, in his latter days, to reverie, absence of mind, and even swift forgetfulness of recent events. In fact, he was sinking into his second state of childhood and innocence," the rector explained, in a tender and reverential voice.

"That accounts for his omission to register the marriage," said the lawyer gravely.

"Yes, and that was unfortunate, especially as he himself, as well as the bridegroom, has since gone to his eternal home. But if you wish to prove the marriage, as I presume from all appearances that you do, you have still the means of doing so. The first and most important is by the testimony of the living witnesses."

"Oh, Heaven!" cried Musa, clasping her hands in despair, "there *are* no living witnesses! My husband is dead; the minister who married us is dead. And I only survive. And my unsupported testimony would be no legal proof of my marriage."

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The lawyer and the rector both looked aghast.

"What!" exclaimed the two, in one voice—"No witnesses to your marriage, Lady Cressy?"

"No; not one! There was no one present but the aged minister, myself and the Earl."

"This is worse than I could possibly have expected!" exclaimed the lawyer, shocked out of all his professional coolness.

"It is another and more serious instance of my father's forgetfulness. Since you brought no witness with you, he should have called in two or three members of the family. Caution and prudence, if not the statute, require the presence of two competent witnesses, besides the contracting parties and the officiating clergyman, to every marriage ceremony. It is deplorable that my father should have forgotten this provision, and that neither you nor your husband should have thought of it," said the rector with a sigh.

"A minister in his dotage, and a boy and girl utterly ignorant of the law and inexperienced in the ways of the world. The marriage performed without witnesses and left unregistered! The secret marriage kept a secret even from nearest friends. The minister and the bridegroom since dead, and the girl left without the means of proving her marriage! What a fatality! Oh, Musa! Musa! was there not enough trouble in your life without this?" muttered the lawyer to himself.

Musa's despairing countenance appealed to the compassion of the rector.

"Do not be so much cast down, Lady Cressy. You may still be able to prove your marriage. You have only to produce the license and the certificate, which must be in your possession; for my father could never have forgotten

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to put them in your hands, for *that* is a part of the ceremony," he explained.

"I cannot even produce the certificate. I have not got it," said Musa despondently. "Indeed your father signed a paper, which he handed me, and which I gave Lord Cressy, who thrust it carelessly into his vest pocket."

"It is a great pity that you have it not at hand. But no doubt it is filed away carefully among the important papers of the late Earl, and can be found there," suggested the rector.

"I fear not. I do not think it has been preserved. You see, sir, that neither of us knew its nature or its value. I am sure that I did not. I thought it was some receipt, possibly for the marriage fee, or something of the sort not worth keeping."

"Still it may have been preserved. A search should be made for it, since it seems necessary to prove your marriage."

"Yes," said the lawyer, rising. "The Duke should be written to upon the subject, and requested to institute a rigid search among the papers and effects of the late Earl. And now, Lady Cressy, I do think we had better go. Mr. Mortimer, I hope that you consider all that has passed between us on this embarrassing subject strictly confidential."

"Strictly so. You have the word of an humble Christian minister for that," replied the rector.

"And oh, gentlemen both," said Musa appealingly, "I must request that you will neither of you address or speak of me again as Lady Cressy, for I have resolved never to assume that name or title until I can prove that I have a legal right to do so. I am Musa Percie for the present."

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"Perhaps you are right. We will talk of that some little time hence," said the lawyer soothingly.

"If I can be of any service to you in this affair, command me at any time," said the rector kindly, as he shook hands with his departing visitors.

"Musa, take my arm; lean upon it heavily, my child," said Mr. Locke, as they walked away from the rectory together, and he perceived how weak she was.

"Mr. Locke, what is your opinion of my chances to prove my marriage with the late Lord Cressy?" she inquired in a faint voice.

"I must have time for reflection before I can give an opinion, my dear," replied the lawyer, as they came up to the spot where the carriage was waiting for them.

He put her into the carriage, entered it and seated himself beside her, and gave the coachman the order:

"Home."

They bowled on homeward at a rapid rate, and in an hour drew up before the house on Vermont Avenue.

"Now, Mr. Locke, do not hide the truth from me. I see by your face that you have already made up your mind upon this matter. Tell me the worst at once. I am strong enough to bear anything except uncertainty," said Musa, when they had both re-entered the house, and were seated together in the library.

"Then, Musa, my child, I will be frank with you. Keep your secret. Keep your maiden name. Abandon all pretensions to the name and title of the Countess of Cressy at once. For, Musa, my dear child, although you have been a true wife, and you are a blameless widow, you cannot prove your marriage."

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CHAPTER X.

FLIGHT.

"THEN—all—is—over—now—with—me."

The fateful words fell from Musa's lips hard, distinct, separate, like bullets dropped from the mould.

Her face was livid, her eyes fixed, her lips, after speaking, bitterly compressed.

Mr. Locke looked at her with uneasiness. Then he went and got a glass of wine, and compelled her to drink it. And then he replied to her despairing utterance:

"Nay, my dear, all cannot be over with a girl of eighteen until she is dead, or—dishonored. You are neither, Musa."

"I had as well be dishonored, and I had better, much better, be dead!" she answered, in the same tone.

"Nay, nay, my child. Think better of your life than that. You *were* married, though you cannot prove your marriage. You are widowed, although it would not be wise for you to publish the fact. Come, my dear, let us be practical. How many persons have you let into the secret of this marriage since its occurrence?" inquired the lawyer.

So dazed was the mind of the unhappy lady, that she had to collect her faculties, and reflect for a few moments, before she could answer.

"Let me see. There is first my old nurse Cassy, to whom I confided the secret on the evening of my wedding-

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day. My next confidant was Lord Gilbert Caux, the new Earl of Cressy, to whom I confided my secret on the day of my arrival in London."

"I hope that he was warned by you not to speak of it until it should be proved."

"Yes, most assuredly; he was placed upon his honor to speak of it only to his father, the Duke of Montcalla, who was my third confidant, and who refused to credit the marriage at all; and who, I am very sure, will never mention it to any one."

"I think he is safe to keep the secret."

"My fourth confidant was yourself, Mr. Locke. I think I can rely upon your discretion."

"I think you can. Lawyers, doctors and priests are professionally as well as honestly and honorably bound to keep the secrets confided to them."

"My fifth confidant, you know, was Mr. Mortimer. Oh! good Heaven! how many people know my secret! It cannot be called a secret at all, when it is known to half a dozen persons. Five besides myself!" said Musa, in despair.

"But each of these half a dozen persons has especial reasons for keeping the secret. You have not told this story to any dear female friend, have you?"

"Oh, no indeed! No woman knows of my marriage besides myself, except Cassy," said the lady, little guessing that her secret and her fair fame were in the possession and at the mercy of her treacherous friend and bitterest enemy, Armida Sutton.

"Then, my dear child," said the lawyer, "your secret is perfectly safe. Now take my advice. 'Let by-gones be by-gones,' as the old people say. Never speak of your marriage again, upon any account whatever. Never think

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of it again, if you can possibly help it. Let it be utterly forgotten. Let it be as if it never had been. Go off to some quiet seaside place for the summer; take your favorite servants with you, and stay there until you recover your spirits sufficiently to enable you to meet the world again with an unruffled brow. Do this, my dear Musa, and fear nothing."

"I thank you for your wise, practical counsel, my dear guardian and friend. I shall follow it as well as I can. I shall certainly never speak of my unfortunate marriage again. But to forget it, as if it had never been, I fear is quite impossible. I shall, however, leave Washington very soon, and shall not return until I shall have recovered something like my normal health and spirits," answered Musa, with a deep sigh.

"And now good-evening, my dear. I will see you again to-morrow. At what hour shall I come?"

"At any hour you please, my dear Mr. Locke. I shall be at home all day. I shall not indeed stir from the house until I leave Washington for the summer."

"Very well; then I will come after business hours are over. Once more, good-evening, my dear," said the lawyer, slowly, almost reluctantly, withdrawing from the room.

As soon as the door closed behind the retreating form of the lawyer, Musa began to walk up and down the floor with hurried, uneven steps, wringing her hands, and moaning:

"It is all over with me! Yes, it is all over, for ever over, with me! It would have been better that I had died than contracted that fatal marriage. Nay, it would have been better that I had never been born, for surely I was born with the curse upon me. What now will be my future life? 'Forget my marriage. Let it be as if it had

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never been. Go to some quiet seaside place, and stay until I shall have recovered health and spirits to meet the world again with an unruffled brow.' Such were the good lawyer's counsels and previsions. Heaven of heavens! He did not know the worst! What would he have said if he had known that there is a child coming to me? Ah, what will be my final fate? But *my* fate is not worth a thought. What will be the fate of my child? If Heaven should send me a boy, that boy will be the rightful successor of his father and his grandfather—the real Earl of Cressy, the real heir of the Dukedom of Montcalla! And yet he will be wronged! wronged! most bitterly wronged out of name, birthright and inheritance, and I shall be powerless to help him!"

And here her anguish burst forth in tears and sobs. She sunk down upon the carpet, buried her face in the cushions of the sofa, and wept in passionate despair—wept as if her heart would break.

Half an hour passed. The clock struck seven. And then some one knocked at the door.

Musa arose to her feet, retreated to the most shadowy part of the room, sat down there, and faintly said:

"Come in."

John the footman entered, and announced:

"Dinner is served, Miss Percie."

"I shall not dine to-day. Send Cassy to me," she said.

And when the man had retired to do her bidding, she carefully wiped all traces of tears from her eyes.

In a few moments Cassy entered the room. In an instant she saw the trouble in the face of her young mistress, and exclaimed:

"Is you ill, Miss Musa? Can't you eat your dinner?"

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"Come with me to my room, Cassy," said the lady, evading the question, and moving toward the door.

"Miss Musa, take my arm, honey. It 's an ole 'oman's arm, but it 's as strong as a horse's. Take my arm, honey. You looks fit to drap; 'deed you do," said the affectionate creature, following her mistress, and with gentle firmness supporting her failing steps until they both reached the lady's chamber.

"Cassy, I am both weak and excited; wanting rest, yet unable to sleep. Can you not get something to give me strength and sleep at the same time?" said Musa, as she sank into a chair.

"There 's laudamy draps, honey," suggested Cassy.

"Oh, no, not laudanum. Is there no herb that will put me to sleep and strengthen me at the same time?"

"Well, yes, honey, there 's hop tea; but it 's *powerful* bitter."

"That will do. Make some of that for me."

Cassy went down into the kitchen to brew the tonic sleeping draught for her mistress, to whom she soon carried it.

Musa, who had already gone to bed, drained the glass to the dregs, and then dismissed her attendants and composed herself to try to sleep.

But she lay awake nearly half an hour before the narcotic began to affect her. After that she gradually fell into a deep and dreamless sleep that lasted all night.

She awoke at broad daylight, feeling much refreshed; but thinking it was yet too early to rise, she turned over on her side and began to reflect upon her future course of action. In the midst of her reverie she closed her eyes, and a vision seemed to pass before her—the face of her lost husband, more beautiful than in life.

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She opened her eyes suddenly, and the vision vanished.

She closed them again, and it reappeared, and only melted away as her reverie passed into sleep; not, however, a dreamless sleep, as that of the night had been.

She was wandering down among the wharfs and quays of an American seaport town. She *saw* the morning sky and the water, the shipping and the piers, the dingy buildings and the tall piles of merchandise. She *smelt* the bilge-water and the tar, along the wharfs; the fish, oysters, flesh and vegetables that filled the market; and all the other multitudinous scents that defiled the air in the lower part of the city. She *heard* mingled discord of many sounds and many voices.

At length she found herself in a tenement house less miserable than its companions, and in a large, poor, but tidy room, where a clean but care-worn woman sat on a low chair at work mending a once handsome, but now dilapidated vest.

In ripping and tearing away the ragged lining of the pocket, the woman pulled out, with fluff and shreds, a folded paper.

"What is this?" she said, unfolding it.

"That is mine!" cried the dreamer, in a paroxysm of excitement, snatching at the prize, which she instinctively knew was her marriage certificate. She awoke, and looked around herself in amazement. So distinct, so vivid, so palpable had been her dream to every sense of hearing, seeing, feeling, so real to her consciousness, that she was perplexed and confounded to find herself in bed, in her own chamber. It seemed as if she had suddenly been transported hither by magic, from that room and that woman in the tenement house.

"I do not like these dreams," she said, covering her face

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with her hand. "They trouble me; they trouble me. They are supernatural."

And she put forth her hand and rang a peal that presently after brought Cassy, trotting as fast as her old feet could fetch her, into the room.

"Is any fing de matter, Miss Musa?" she inquired in alarm.

"Nothing at all. I want to get up—that is all," coolly replied the lady.

"Werry well, honey," answered the old nurse, placing her mistress' silk slippers ready for her feet.

"Cassy, do you know why I went to England?" inquired the young lady.

"Yes, honey, I knows all about it, dough you never told me. First place, I knows as you went off to England to jine your husband, de Early young gentleman. I know as how you found him dead when you got dere, and den I know *his* people didn't do de right fing by you, all 'cept de oder Early young gentleman, your broder-in-law, who was mighty good to us all—yes, dat he was. And de way I knowed as de ole people didn't do de right fing by you, is from little fings drapped by you and de oder Early young gentleman when you was talkin' togeder, and me in de same room."

"Well, Cassy, you are nearly right in all your conjectures. But the end of it all is this, Cassy," said Musa, with a deep sigh: "I cannot prove my marriage. And so the subject must never be mentioned from this time forth. Do you understand?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Musa, I understan's well 'nough, honey. And I an't much surprised neider," replied the old nurse, with a half-smothered groan.

"And, Cassy, listen further. You and I will have to go travelling again."

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"So I 'spected, honey. So I 'spected, indeed."

"But, old nurse, this time we two will have to go alone together. We must not take Servia with us."

"What, take dat giddy gal along of us *now?* No, honey, I reckon not indeed."

"I see you understand me, Cassy. I am glad of it."

"Yes, honey, I unnerstans you a sight better 'n you unnerstans yerse'f in some fings. Now, honey, come down to breakfas'."

"I am ready, Cassy. Come," answered the lady, leading the way. "And after breakfast, Cassy, we must pack up for our journey."

After breakfast was over, Musa summoned her two personal attendants and repaired to her private apartments, to superintend the packing of more trunks than she had ever had occasion to move before.

Servia, when informed that she was not to go with her mistress on the present journey, bore her disappointment better than could have been expected.

But, to tell the truth, Servia had a lover at home, whom she did not wish to leave. She and John the footman were engaged to be married some time in the autumn of that year.

Late in the afternoon, Mr. Locke called. Musa received him in the library.

"When do you leave Washington, my dear?" he inquired, after the first salutations were over.

"At nine o'clock to-morrow morning, and I shall not return to the city before the meeting of Congress, in December."

The lawyer started slightly, but quickly recovered his professional coolness and self-command.

"In the meantime, Mr. Locke," she continued, "I leave

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all my affairs here in your hands. When the ladies of my household return to Vermont Avenue, if they please to return, tell them that you are authorized by me to honor their drafts for household and other expenses."

"I will, my dear Musa, to a certain extent. I hope that you will give me some discretionary power, to prevent you from being too freely taxed by your dear friends," said the lawyer somewhat cynically.

"Certainly, Mr. Locke, I leave all in your hands," said the lady.

"And now, my dear Musa, as you have to leave so early in the morning, I will bid you good-evening."

"One moment, Mr. Locke. If I should ever have occasion to refer to you for the social and financial standing of the Widow Brown, or Green, or White, for instance, I may rely upon your endorsement of the poor woman?" inquired Musa mysteriously.

For a moment the lawyer hesitated, and then, as he understood the question, he replied promptly:

"Certainly. Any lady favored by you shall be endorsed by me."

"I thank you with all my heart, Mr. Locke. Your faith is boundless."

"In you, my child; not in all human beings. And now good-night, my dear."

"Heaven bless you, Mr. Locke."

"And you, my dear girl. Good-night."

Early the next morning, Musa Percie—for though she was truly the Countess of Cressy, we must call her, as all others will call her still, Musa Percie—and her one faithful attendant left Washington for the Northern States.

In one of the dingiest streets in the lower part of the city

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of New York, stood a crowded tenement, with scarcely a patch of back yard to breathe in.

In one of the back attic rooms, which was large and pleasant, with great dormer windows, that, overlooking the roofs of neighboring houses, commanded a fine view of the harbor and shipping, dwelt a woman and a child, the wife and step-son of a sailor then supposed to be on his voyage home.

The sailor's wife was a handsome, healthy looking young woman, of about twenty-eight years of age, with fine features and fresh complexion, bright brown eyes and smooth brown hair. She wore an inexpensive light blue gingham dress and a pure white cambric apron.

She was seated in a low chair, in the recess of one of the dormer windows that overlooked the sea, and she was working at her vocation, that of an artificial flower maker.

Her little son, a bright dark-eyed boy of about seven years of age, sat at her feet, helping her by such simple work as wrapping green or brown tissue paper around fine wires, to form the stems for the flowers that his mother's nimble fingers were cutting and moulding into shape.

On the broad window-sill before them, sat boxes of tinted and shaded muslin, bundles of fine wires, bristles, horse-hair, glue, paints, brushes, and other materials of their art.

"When is pappy coming home, mammy?" inquired the boy.

"Soon, I hope, Sam," answered the mother.

"He promised to bring me a monkey and a poll-parrot and a conk shell. I wonder if he will."

"He will if he can, for he is very good to you."

"But he an't my own dear pappy, for all that."

"He is just as good as if he was. He is your own dear step-father, and you ought to love him."

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"So I do. My own dear pappy got drownded at sea, didn't he?"

"Yes, your poor pappy was drowned at sea, when you were about two years old."

"Yes, I know. If this pappy was to get drownded too, would I have another pappy after him?"

The face of the young woman grew violently red.

"Hold your tongue, you bad boy!" she very unjustly exclaimed.

"Well, I only ast you, mammy. I don't care. I don't *want* one. I've got a rich grandpappy though, haven't I?"

"Yes; but you might 's well have none. He was bad to your poor father, and it an't likely he 'll be good to you."

"I don't care. I don't *want* him to. But he 's got lots and lots and lots of money, hasn't he?"

"Yes; but you 'll never get any of it."

"I don't care. I don't *want* any. And lots of niggers, an't he?"

"Yes; but what 's that to you? What do *you* know about your brute of a grandfather?"

"I heard you tell Mrs. Smith all about him yesterday. And how he lived away down South, and drove poor pappy away from home when he was a boy. I don't want any of his money. And I wouldn't *have* it—no, not if he was to come and *ask* me. Would *you*, mammy?"

His mother did not answer. Something else had diverted her attention.

A heavy step was heard upon the garret stairs. It approached her door and stopped. There came a rap.

"Who is there? Come in," said the sailor's wife.

The door opened and a man in a sailor's dress slowly entered, and as slowly closed the door behind him, taking

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as much time over it as he possibly could. As soon as he turned around after closing the door, Mrs. Seaforth started up and sprang toward him, exclaiming:

"Oh, Bob! Bob Morton! Is that you? The ship is in then. Where 's Jack?"

"Let me sit down, missus, and get my breath, after climbing all these steps from the sidewalk to the roof, as I may say," answered the man, who was an English sailor, though at that time in the American naval service. And he literally dropped upon a chair and began wiping his face, which had turned pale under all its sun-burned crimson.

"Bob Morton, what 's the matter with you? What made you come here by yourself? Where 's Jack? What has happened? What are you trying to hide from me?" demanded the sailor's wife, detecting her visitor's distress, and quickly taking the alarm.

"Missus," said the sailor in a broken voice, while the tears sprang to his honest eyes, "it 's hard—it 's *blamed* hard"—the rough fellow used a more objectionable perfect participle, but I will not report it of him here—"it 's *blamed* hard, but I was his messmate, and I must do it." And here Bob Morton paused, and found that he couldn't do it, after all.

"*Was* his messmate? Bob Morton! Is—MY HUSBAND DEAD—DEAD?" demanded the terrified woman, ending her question in a scream, as she seized the arm of the sailor and gazed wildly into his face.

"Now do be a brave girl, and don't go off—don't, missus! Yes, he 's gone, poor lad. Steady—steady now! Don't! Yes, he 's gone. But I 've brought home his kit, and will fetch it to you as soon 's I can get it up out of the cock-pit. Steady—steady now, my girl! And lots of

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prize-money. Steady now, like a brave girl as you are!" continued the sailor, doing the best he could in his rough way to comfort the newly bereaved widow.

She had sunk down on a chair and thrown her white apron over her head and dropped her face upon her hands, and was moaning in heart-broken tones, as she rocked herself up and down.

"Tell me all about it. How did it happen?" at length she inquired, in a choking voice, without uncovering or raising her head.

"La, missus, don't you know? All New York and Washington knows by this time. But, Lord! how *should* you, since nobody has told you? But I thought the mention of the prize-money might give you a hint. Any ways, missus, we were sent after the great pirate Brute. You've heard about Brute, as have pestered our merchantmen so much? Well, we went for him, and after sailing about a bit we made him, just off Fayal. We chased him all one night, and overhauled him about sunrise next morning. And after a pretty hard fight, in which we lost five men, besides having twenty badly and eighteen slightly wounded, we captured him. And, my dear, our captain put the pirate and his crew in irons, on board of our own ship, and sent Lieutenant Dow with a detachment of picked men on board the prize, to bring her home. And he have brought her home straight to the Brooklyn navy yard. And Brute and his pals are in the Tombs at this moment. There, there's the fight in brief."

"But my husband! My poor Jack! Tell me about him!" cried the woman, bursting into a paroxysm of tears and sobs.

"He died happy, missus; he did, indeed. Why shouldn't he? He who loved his neighbor as himself, and

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did all the good to every human creetur that he could do? And you know he was a praying Christian besides, missus."

"Oh, my poor Jack! Oh, my dear, brave, good Jack! Shall I never see you again?" cried the widow, weeping and swinging herself to and fro.

"Surely, missus, you 'll meet him again, if you want to. It lays to your own choice, you know. Which he told me werry particular to tell you, to be sure to meet him in heaven," gravely replied the sailor.

The woman burst out crying again, and the child cried for company.

"That 's enough for once, missus," said the sailor, who felt that he could not stand this scene much longer, and picked up his tarpaulin hat from between his feet and put it on his head, preparatory to leaving. "I 'll go now and see after the kit and the prize-money; and to-night, when you feel better, I 'll come up and answer any other questions as you may wish to put to me."

And so saying, the good fellow slipped from the room.

That night he returned to the house in charge of poor Jack's "kit," a large and heavy sea-chest.

A few days after this, when the ship was paid off, and the prize-money divided, poor Jack's widow received what seemed to her the enormous sum of three hundred dollars.

From the day on which she had heard of her husband's tragic death, Maggy Seaforth took a deep dislike to all the surroundings that reminded her of her loss.

She longed for a cheap little house all to herself and her boy, in some suburban neighborhood where she should never behold the sea or the shipping, and where she could gaze upon green fields and distant woods.

So, when her prize-money came, she determined to look

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for a plain little house at Harlem, where she could have a little garden to raise vegetables and flowers, and where she could keep chickens, and perhaps a cow.

She went on her search by the street cars, and was soon successful in finding what she wanted—a small two-story, white-painted cottage, standing in its own grounds, with a small vegetable and flower-garden in front, and a poultry yard behind. She found out the agent, and went to him and rented the cottage before she returned to Water street. And as her month in the old tenement house would be up in a week, she determined to move within a few days.

So, early the next morning, she began to prepare for the flitting.

Among other things, she unpacked poor Jack's "kit."

She found in it bright shawls and dresses, that she knew had been bought for presents for herself, and a suit of clothes for Sam. And she found besides, a nice, very nice second-hand suit of gentleman's clothes, consisting of a handsome black frock-coat, a black satin vest, and a pair of black cloth pantaloons.

"Poor Jack!" she said to herself—"poor, dear Jack! He did love to dress like a gentleman when he was on shore, and going to church on Sunday with me and Sam. And I s'pose he got this elegant suit cheap at second-hand in London, though it must have cost a good hundred dollars when it was new. I wonder if the poor dear fellow ever got a chance to wear it," she said, as she began to examine the pockets of the coat.

She found nothing; so she folded it up and laid it away.

She next took up the vest, and ran her hand into the pockets, and her delicate touch, accustomed to the nice manipulation of muslin, in the moulding of artificial flow-

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ers, detected the presence of a paper between the lining and the facing of the vest, below the pocket.

On further examination, she found that the paper had slipped through a ripped seam in the bottom of the pocket.

"Now I should not wonder if this were a Bank of England note that poor Jack hid here," she said, as she drew it out, and perceived that it was a partly printed and partly written document.

But when she unfolded it, she saw that it was a marriage license, dated Washington City, February 3d, issued in favor of one Donald Hugh, Earl of Cressy, and one Musadora Percie, by the clerk of the Court of the District of Columbia, and certified and signed by one Archibald Mortimer, D.D., the minister who had performed the marriage ceremony.

The parties were all, of course, total strangers to her; she had never even heard of them before. She languidly wondered how a Washington marriage license came to be hidden in a London vest lining, and then she was about to throw it away, when some influence, she scarcely knew what, impressed her to preserve it. So she folded it carefully again, and took it and put it in a small lock box, where she kept her few precious treasures.

She went on with her preparations for moving, and with so much dispatch that in the first days of June she was settled in her new home in Harlem.

The widow spent fifty dollars of her prize-money in buying additional furniture, which, together with what she had brought from Water street, enabled her to fit up two rooms on one side of the passage. Fifty more dollars she invested in a cow and some chickens.

And she then put the remaining two hundred dollars in

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the Savings Bank, and resumed her vocation of artificial flower making.

But business was slack, and she had not half enough work to occupy her time, or to pay the heavier rent that she had undertaken.

Sam, who was an active and enterprising little fellow for his age, began to sell newspapers in Harlem.

But still they could not pay expenses without drawing upon their little capital in the Savings Bank, which they were obliged to do when the first month's rent fell due.

"If this goes on," Maggy said to her only confidant, Sam, "if this goes on, we shall soon be as poor as paupers. I wish I could take lodgers. Now, if I could get a real nice lady, a lone widow like myself, for a permanent lodger, I would take one."

"Would you, mammy? Well, look here now. Here's —w-i-d-o-w, in the L–O–D—lodging column. Right atop! Look!" said Sam, who had just come in from his rounds, with one paper left unsold.

The woman took the paper languidly and read:

"A widow lady of retired habits wishes to obtain accommodations, for herself and her colored female servant, in a quiet plain family, where there are no other lodgers taken. A widow's house and a suburban locality preferred. Reference satisfactory. Address Solataire, at this office."

As the reader will readily divine, this was Musa's advertisement. Mrs. Seaforth answered it immediately. Musa drove out to "Willow Cottage," was pleased with the place and with the landlady, rented rooms at a liberal price, and furnished them herself.

On the following Monday, all things being in readiness, Musa moved into her new home.

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It was arranged that she should board herself, and that Cassy should prepare their meals.

Musa was warmly though respectfully welcomed by her landlady, who had a hot cup of tea and plate of milk toast waiting to refresh her.

While Musa was partaking of this in Mrs. Seaforth's parlor, Sam came in from his rounds with his arms full of papers.

Musa set down her cup to look at him.

"Why, what a lovely boy!" she involuntarily exclaimed, as she gazed with admiration on his clear dark complexion, regular, classic features, rich black curly hair, and long-lashed, large, glowing black eyes. "What a beautiful boy! Your son?" she inquired, turning to Mrs. Seaforth.

"Yes, ma'am," proudly replied the mother, looking fondly on her boy, "he is my son, and the greatest comfort I have in the whole world. Though indeed!" she exclaimed, starting and looking from her boy to her new tenant—"indeed, to look at you and him, any one might think he was *your* son. I never see such a likeness in all my days—never! Do look, ma'am, for yourself," she added, as she hitched a small glass from the wall and handed it to Musa.

"I think the child is like me, if I remember truly what manner of woman I am," said the lady, as she took the glass and looked into it at her own beautiful dark face, and from that to its perfect image in the boy's.

"Wonderful like you! Most extraordinary like you, ma'am! And not like me one bit. Now any one would think, to see us three together, that *he* was your son instead of mine. No offence, I hope, ma'am, for any lady might be proud to own him, while as for me, I would not

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part from him for the whole world," said the widow enthusiastically.

"I am quite sure I should be proud of so fine a boy," said Musa, pushing back his curly black hair and gazing into his fine dark eyes.

And then she thanked her kind landlady, and went upstairs to the spacious chamber prepared for her.

From this day Maggie Seaforth, who had fallen in love at first sight with her new tenant, began to treat Musa with the most reverential tenderness and devotion. And Musa gratefully appreciated this devotion. And a friendship grew up between the wealthy lady and the poor widow such as seldom exists between two women.

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CHAPTER XI.

MUSETTE—MUSA IN SOCIETY AGAIN.

VERY calmly passed the life of Musa at Willow Cottage. The autumn weather was glorious. She always arose and breakfasted early, and if the morning was clear, as was almost always the case, she took long walks down by the river's side, amusing herself by watching the steamers go up and down, and the little row boats glide to and fro.

She usually returned about the middle of the forenoon, and for two or three hours she engaged herself in needle-work. In the convent where she had been educated, she had been taught needle-work, both as an accomplishment and as a duty; and now, in her forced retirement from the world, she found in it both an occupation and a solace.

She bought the finest materials for her purpose that could be found in the Harlem shops, and she manufactured from them the most exquisite little garments. And whenever she found herself at fault, in cutting and shaping any little article of apparel, she would call in Mrs. Seaforth, who always proudly and gladly lent her counsel and assistance.

She dined early, as a matter of hygiene. And after dinner she lay upon a lounge near a window that overlooked the river, and read some agreeable book until she fell asleep.

After a half hour's nap, she would awaken much refreshed, send for a carriage from the nearest livery-stable,

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and take a two hours' ride through the country. She would then return to tea. And after tea she would either go down to spend the evening with Mrs. Seaforth, or else invite the kind-hearted landlady to come and stay until bedtime with herself.

When the weather *did* happen to be too inclement to admit of her walking or riding out, which very seldom occurred, she passed the whole day within doors, sewing on the infant's outfit, reading amusing books, or writing letters to her guardian. Once she wrote to her young brother-in-law, telling him the disastrous issue of her attempts to get legal proofs of her marriage, and imploring him never to mention her name in the presence of his family, or of any one who had ever known her, but to let her be forgotten, as if she had never existed. And in writing this letter, for his satisfaction only, she never gave him any address at which he might write to her.

She was very careful never to post any letters at Harlem, not even those addressed to her old guardian, whom she kept also in ignorance of her exact whereabouts.

But once or twice during the week, as she felt inclined, she took a carriage from the livery-stable she patronized, and drove to New York, and to the general post-office, where she would mail such letters as she had written, and from whence she would receive such as were awaiting her call.

One Saturday morning, late in October, when the fine weather tempted her to go on a longer drive than usual, she drove to the general post-office, and inquired if there was anything for "Mrs. Mary White," which was the name she had assumed.

After a little search, the clerk handed her a bulky packet, directed in the handwriting of Mr. Lyttleton Locke.

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She re-entered her carriage, and told the coachman to drive slowly back to Harlem.

Then she settled herself in her seat and opened the bulky packet.

Several letters fell out. All were in separate, sealed envelopes, except one which was simply folded.

Musa took up the last-mentioned first.

It was from her guardian, and it merely informed her that he had received all those letters directed to his care for her, and he presumed they were from friends and correspondents who did not know her real address. One letter, from England, he hoped might be of importance to her; and if so, and if he could be of any further service to her in any matter of which that English letter might treat, he hoped that she would not hesitate to inform him at once.

Musa broke the seal of the English letter. This was, as she had anticipated, from Lord Gilbert Caux, or, rather, as we must learn to call him, the new Earl of Cressy.

He addressed her, as she had commanded him to do, as Miss Percie. He wrote in a very affectionate, and yet in a somewhat reproachful tone. He told her that whatever might be the difficulties in the way of proving her marriage with his brother, to the satisfaction of their father and of the world at large, the marriage was sufficiently well proved to him, simply by his own knowledge of his brother and faith in herself. Therefore, he added, it distressed him to speak of her and write to her as Miss Percie, when, as the widow of his dear brother, she should be known by her true name and title, as Lady Cressy. And whatever might be the final issue of her fortunes, he should always honor her as a woman and love her as a sister. And with this assurance he concluded.

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"Dear Bertie! good Bertie! Oh, not among the least of my losses is the loss of you! For I have lost you, young brother, even as though death had taken you also. Ah, I am almost persuaded that the good Sisters in the convent, and the old lawyer in the city, spoke the truth when they warned me what I should find life in the great world to be. Not twelve months have yet passed since I entered the world under the most brilliant auspices and with the brightest hopes, and succeeded in reaching the highest pinnacle of social celebrity, and forming a most distinguished marriage; and now, now I am here, with a blighted life! a blighted life! The world *is* even as they warned me I would find it—a howling wilderness, full of furies. I wonder if other people have found it out to be so, as well as I have. Very likely, very likely. They admire me and envy me, and some of them even hate me for my imagined prosperity and happiness, and they do not guess the secret that has blighted my life. And I—I do not know the secrets of their lives either. 'Masks and faces! masks and faces!' I think my old African nurse has unwittingly blundered on the truth when she called our fashionable reunions 'grand deceptions,'" sadly concluded the lady.

And so much moved had she been by the feelings awakened in the receipt and perusal of Lord Cressy's letter, that she quite forgot the others until her eye fell upon them. She took them up, and examined them one by one.

A few minutes more brought her to her lodgings in Harlem, where she found a dainty luncheon awaiting her.

Saturday afternoon she spent in answering all her letters. But she dated her answers from New York City. And on Monday morning, when she drove to the general post-office to mail them, she took old Cassy with her.

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"For you must learn the way, Cassy; because after this, for some weeks to come, I shall have to send you to mail and receive my letters for me," Musa explained.

"Yes, honey, I s'pose you will; which, to tell de bressed trufe, der an't nuffin in dis worl' as I 'joys better 'n settin' back at my ease and ridin' into a carriage," promptly replied the old woman.

And she attentively observed the way of entrance into the office, and watched all her mistress said and did when she got there.

"I knows all de ingredients of mailin' letters and axin' for 'em now, Miss Musa, well as I do makin' of a puddin'; and I kin do it just about right, and you needn't be noways oneasy 'bout de safety ob your'n for de futur', which I 'm willin' to ride back'ards and for'ards for ebber and a day, fetchin' and carryin'," concluded Nurse Cassy.

That afternoon Musa returned home so very much fatigued, that her resolution to go no more to New York for some weeks to come was confirmed.

From this time Musa began to hasten her final preparations for the reception of her child. And as the time of its expected arrival approached, the cloud of a presentiment of death overshadowed her spirit. And now a contingency occurred to her mind for the first time. If she should die and leave a living child, that child could not inherit the least part of all her vast estate, because her marriage could not be proved; that child would be thrown a helpless beggar on the world, unless she should take the precaution to provide for it by making a will in its favor.

No sooner had this idea taken possession of her mind than she resolved to lose no time in making her will. She searched the Business Directory of New York for the names and addresses of lawyers.

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She wished to obtain the services of a good and reliable attorney. But knowing nothing of the professional men of the city, and nobody of whom she could seek information, she could only judge from external circumstances.

She thought a lawyer who had a good office down town, and a handsome house up town, must necessarily have a large practice, and therefore be a capable man. So at length she fixed upon one who stood recorded thus:

"Haughton, I. V., Attorney and Counsellor at Law. Office, 8 Judiciary Place. House, — Fifth Avenue."

The next day she sent for a carriage and drove to 8 Judiciary Place, and on inquiring for Mr. Haughton, was shown into the sanctum of the eminent lawyer. As he handed her a chair and begged her to be seated, she looked at him attentively, and felt pleased at his appearance and reassured by his manner.

Musa felt that she could trust him, as he sat there serenely waiting to be trusted.

But still her business was very peculiar, and very difficult of explanation unless she could have brought herself to tell the whole truth. This she could not at first do, but tried half to tell and half to hide her story.

Presently Mr. Haughton gently interrupted her by saying:

"My dear young lady, I think I understand your dilemma; but if you wish me to serve you efficiently, you must confide in me without reserve."

And he arose and poured out a glass of water, and brought it to her.

She bowed her thanks and drank it, and then—she *did* confide in him.

She told him the story of her marriage and her trouble, as it is known to the reader.

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While she spoke, he sat with his hands folded, calmly attending to her. When she had concluded, he said:

"My dear young lady, I cannot take the desponding view of your case that you and your Washington attorney seem to do. I think it is most likely that you will yet be able to prove your marriage. But that is not the point now. You wish, in case of accident, to make a provision for your child?"

"Yes, sir," faltered Musa; "I do."

"And you wish to make a will bequeathing your whole estate directly to this child?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think I would not do that."

"Why, Mr. Haughton?"

"Because I think there is a safer and surer way of carrying out your real intentions toward your child."

"Yes? What is that?"

"Bequeath your estate to your tried and trusted friend, Mr. Lyttleton Locke, *in trust* for your child," gravely replied the lawyer.

"That will be the best way?"

"Under the peculiar circumstances, undoubtedly."

"Then please to draw up a will to that effect, Mr. Haughton."

"Yes," said the lawyer, drawing a sheet of paper before him, and dipping his pen in ink. "But you must give me a few notes for the first draft."

He drew his chair nearer to hers, and he questioned her from time to time, as he took notes for her will, which was soon prepared and read to Musa.

She then said that she was ready to sign it.

He called in two young men from the outer office. And in their presence she signed her name as testatrix, after

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which they, in turn, signed theirs as witnesses, and retired.

The lawyer then delivered the document to the lady, and received his handsome fee.

And Musa thanked him warmly for his services, and took leave.

That night, after returning home, Musa felt very much fatigued and depressed. She called Cassy to the side of the sofa on which she lay, and tearfully addressed her:

"Nurse, I want you to give me your serious attention. Nurse, dear nurse, I feel that I shall not live through my coming trial."

"I know you does, honey; o' course you does," cheerfully replied Cassy, to her mistress' great surprise.

"I do not think you understand me," she said, in a tone of vexation. "I am going to die. I feel a sure presentiment of death."

"I know you does, honey; course you does. That 's all right and nateral 'nough," answered Cassy, as blithely as before.

Anger was beginning to master sorrow in Musa's quick temperament.

"What do you mean, you cruel nurse? Is it all right and natural that I should die? young as I am, too?" she sobbed.

"No, honey, but nateral 'nough as you should *fink* you was agoin' to. Most all young people in your circumferences allers finks as dey 're gwine to die; which is a sure and sartain sign as dey an't a gwine to do no sich a fing. Dat 's de reason why I right down glad to hear you say you knows you 're goin' to die," said Cassy chirpingly.

And somehow or other, Musa felt more reassured by her words than if she had pitied and petted her.

"Now, honey, as you knows yer gwine to die, you know,

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'haps you 's got some las' words and messages to leave wid me for friends as be," dryly suggested Cassy.

"Yes, nurse; that is why I called you to my side. Bring me my jewel box and bunch of small keys," replied Musa, now half ashamed of her despondency.

Cassy brought the box and the keys to the side of the sofa.

"Sit down by me, nurse, and keep the box on your lap, while I talk to you."

Cassy gravely obeyed, looking wise and attentive, and a little sarcastic.

"Now listen, Cassy. I feel as if I were going to be very, very ill, and have a very narrow escape of my life, even if I escape at all."

"Yes, honey; all right."

"Hush, nurse, and hear *me*," said Musa, feeling half offended and half encouraged by Cassy's dry humor.

"Go on, honey. I 's listenin' wid all my ears, an' they tol'able big ones," solemnly replied the woman.

"Then, Cassy, in my illness I may become delirious or unconscious, or in some other way unable to give orders. *If so*—listen now, Cassy—*if so*, no matter how ill I may be, even unto death, you are not to admit any one to my room, except the doctor; you are not to give any one any information about me, more than they have had from myself; and, above all, you are not to have any of my friends summoned from Washington. Now do you understand that, Cassy?"

"Yes, Miss Musa, perfect," answered the woman, now speaking earnestly.

"And you promise to do as I direct you?"

"On my solemn oath, honey, I do promise."

"Now then, *if I should die*, immediately after my death you must send off a letter to Mr. Locke."

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"Yes, honey."

"Now give me that box and the keys."

Cassy placed the box on the sofa close to her mistress, and gave her the keys.

She unlocked the box, and showed the woman its contents:

First, a large folded and enveloped parchment.

"That," she said, "is my will."

Second, a sealed and directed letter.

"That," she added, "is a letter to be sent to Mr. Locke. You see, nurse?"

"Yes, honey."

"Now then, Cassy, you must take this box and these keys into your own keeping. If I should die, you will send off this letter immediately to Mr. Locke. He will hurry on here, I know. And as soon as he shall arrive, Cassy, you will give him this box containing this will. There, now take it, and put it away in a safe place among your own effects;" and Musa relocked the casket, and sank back on her pillow.

"I puts it inter de bottom ob my big chist, which if anybody gets at it dere, dout my leabe, dey mus' be smarter 'n I am," grunted the old woman, as she carried off the treasure.

Musa's presentiment was not fulfilled.

That night indeed she was seized with a violent illness, and for two days she struggled between life and death. But on the evening of the second day, half delirious from past suffering, and faint from exhaustion, she sank into a deep, sweet sleep, that continued unbroken until the morning of the third day, when she awoke refreshed.

Her room was very dark and still. Her window shutters were closed, but she saw between their slender slats fine

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threads of golden light, that showed her the morning bright with sunshine beyond these shadows.

"Is any one here?" she faintly inquired.

"Yes, honey, I is," answered Cassy, rising from her shadowy seat at the head of the bed and bending over her mistress. "I 's here, chile. How does you feel?"

"Very well," answered the lady.

"Thank Goodness!" exclaimed the nurse, as she went to the window and opened the shutter a little way, to admit some light.

Then she went back to the bed, and bending over her mistress, inquired:

"Will you look at de baby now, honey?"

"The baby!" faintly exclaimed the lady, whose sleep had been so profound that she had temporarily forgotten the events of the past two days.

"Yes, honey; de Lord has sent you de beautifullest little baby, worf all you 's gone t'rough," said the nurse, tenderly placing in the mother's arms a soft, tiny being, enveloped in fine muslins and flannels.

"A boy? Oh! I hope——" said the lady, trembling with anxiety.

"No, honey, but the loveliest little girl as ever you see. Bless her little heart! Kiss her and love her, honey, if she *is* only a girl," said the nurse, mistaking the lady's unfinished words.

"Only a girl! Oh, thank Heaven!"

Musa's convalescence was very rapid. Before the end of November she was down in her cheerful sitting-room, with her child in a pretty berceaunette beside her.

And on the first fine day in December, she went out driving in a close carriage with her child and nurse.

The baby girl was large for her age, and healthy and

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thriving. And she was beautiful, with the rich, dark, brilliant beauty of her mother. Yet, from the first, there was in the babe's dark eyes an earnest, wistful, pathetic look, that attracted every one's notice and touched all hearts.

Maternal love was not the master passion in Musa Percie's nature, as it is in the nature of almost every woman. She loved the pretty little tiny image of herself that lay upon her lap, and looked at her so wistfully with its deep dark eyes; and because it was herself in miniature, she called it "Musette." And she made many plans for its future welfare and happiness. She firmly resolved that she would never marry, but would live for this child alone; would give it the best moral, religious and intellectual training that love, money and experience could command, and that finally she would leave it all her property.

Meantime the world was beckoning its idol.

From the first of December, Musa began to receive urgent letters from her Washington friends.

Mr. Locke wrote, reminding her of her promise to return some time early in the month, informing her that he thought Mrs. Shrewsbury's drafts, which he had been instructed to honor, were frequent and exorbitant, and suggesting that Musa's house and Musa's interests alike required her presence at home.

Mrs. Shrewsbury wrote, asking her when she intended to return, and telling her that the house had been thoroughly renovated and beautified for the fashionable season, and was quite ready for the reception of its elegant mistress.

Clarice wrote, saying that the meeting of Congress had come off with *éclat*, that the city was rapidly filling up with visitors, and that the fashionable season promised to

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be the gayest and most brilliant that had ever been known in Washington.

Armida Sutton wrote, saying that after spending the Christmas holidays with her widowed mother, she should immediately come to Washington to spend the winter with her friend, and would take care to arrive in time to assist her on the occasion of the grand New-year's reception at Vermont Avenue. "For at such a time I would not have our 'ruby' miss one 'pearl' of her setting," she added.

And Mrs. Carew wrote, expressing disappointment at not having seen Miss Percie at Raven Rocks that autumn, but proposing to indemnify herself for the loss by coming to spend the winter at Vermont Avenue.

All these letters had been forwarded through Mr. Lyttleton Locke, who was supposed to keep the run of the address of Musa, who was believed to be still travelling in the North.

Musa answered all these letters, saying that she should be in Washington before the first of January, and in good time to receive her friends on New-year's day.

And in fact her eager, restless, vehement nature had already grown as weary of her quiet life at Willow Cottage, as it had ever been of her stagnant life in the convent.

She longed to get back to Washington, and throw herself into the giddy whirl of pleasure; to reign once more a loved and worshipped queen of beauty and of fashion; and to bury in perpetual oblivion all the errors, sorrows and humiliations of her life in the last twelve months.

But her child?

Although she thought she loved it only moderately, as she had loved its father, yet still, whenever she held it on her lap and met the sad, wistful look—the look "how

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meekly loving!" that seemed to plead for mother's love—her heart bled with pity at the thought of leaving it.

"It is *so* helpless. It cannot prevent me from leaving it; it has no words to ask me not to go; it does not even know that I am going. Oh, how cruel and treacherous and unnatural it seems, to leave such a little helpless being! And my own child too! If her own mother forsake her, who shall care for her?" she cried, with a burst of tears.

"And yet, what can I do? I cannot stay with you, my little patient darling," she sobbed, bending down over her child as it lay upon her lap, and pressing a kiss upon its meek baby brow.

"I cannot stay with you, nor can I take you with me. To do either, would be to ruin us both, my angel," she added, weeping.

"Yet, though I must leave you, my little Musette, I will not indeed forsake you, my precious. I will watch over you from my distant home. I will steal away, and come to see you very often. And every spring I will come and stay with you all the summer. And for your sake I will never marry again. And some day I may be so fortunate as to prove my marriage, and establish you in your own rank as the daughter of an earl, little Lady Musette."

And so she wept and sobbed, and defended herself, and pleaded her cause with her own innocent, unconscious babe. . . .

And this she did not once, but many times, in the interval that elapsed between the birth of her child and the departure of herself for Washington.

She had matured all her plans in regard to her child. She had, after a great deal of trouble, succeeded in finding a wet-nurse whose appearance and references perfectly sat-

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isfied her—a healthy, handsome young married woman of the village, whose own young child had just gone to heaven, and whose husband, a sailor, was at sea on a three years' cruise.

She soon had the comfort of seeing that the babe and her substitute mother took kindly and lovingly to each other.

She next determined to keep on her suite of apartments at Willow Cottage, paying her landlady as much for them as would cover the rent of the whole house; to leave little Musette in the charge of Mrs. Seaforth, paying her as large a salary for her services as should make it a great object for the poor widow to cherish the little life that was to provide her own handsome living; and to leave Cassy and the wet-nurse, Mary Morris, in attendance on the child and in charge of her apartments, to keep them always ready for her own return, when she should wish to come; and finally to constitute Mr. Haughton, the lawyer, her agent to pay all the expenses of this her Harlem establishment.

But though she had matured these plans even to the smallest detail, she had as yet said nothing to Maggie Seaforth about it.

She had not in her own mind the least doubt but that Mrs. Seaforth would gladly agree to the proposed arrangement.

Nor was she mistaken; for when she informed her landlady that she should be obliged, for certain reasons, to go to Washington for a few weeks, but did not think it safe to take so young a child on so long a journey, at such an inclement season of the year, and therefore that she preferred to leave it at home with the nurse and housekeeper, all under the immediate charge of herself—Mrs. Seaforth—

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and further mentioned the very liberal compensation she was willing to make her landlady for her services, Maggie Seaforth, to use a popular expression, "jumped at the offer."

"And here is the address of my attorney—I. V. Haughton, 8 Judiciary Place, New York—to whom you must take your bills every month for settlement, and to whom you must send all letters addressed to me until my return," Musa explained, as she handed a card to Maggie.

Three days from this, namely, on the twentieth of December, Musa wrote to Mr. Lyttleton Locke, requesting him to apprise the ladies of her household that she should reach home on the evening of the twenty-third instant, and to ask them to send her carriage and servants to meet her at the railway station.

And on the appointed day Musa bade adieu to all the inmates of Willow Cottage, and kissed and wept over and prayed over her child, and entered the carriage that was to take her to Jersey City to meet the Washington train. But oh, after all, although she had thought that she only loved her child moderately, as she had loved its lost father, still she felt that in leaving it, she had left her better self behind.

Every mile of the drive from Harlem to Jersey City, and every stage of the railway journey from Jersey City to Washington, she felt the drawing of that invisible spiritual cord that bound her to her child.

And, oh, how she was haunted by the sorrowful, sweet vision of a baby face, with deep dark eyes, looking wistfully into hers.

There were moments when she felt that she could not persist in this cruel desertion of the helpless little being; when she thought that she could not endure the separa-

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tion, and when she resolved, on her arrival at Washington, to take the very next train back to New York, and to hurry to Harlem, clasp her child to her bosom, and give up the whole world for the comfort of its meek, innocent love.

It was a heart-breaking journey, this flight from the child of her affections. But it ended with the day.

It was near dusk when the train "slowed" and glided into its station.

Musa stepped out upon the platform, and found not only her carriage and servants, but Mrs. and Miss Shrewsbury awaiting her.

They greeted her with acclamations, and hurried her into the carriage, and talked with her all the way home.

Clarice told her of the great number of delightful people that were in the city to spend the winter, and of the cards that had been left at the house, and of the invitations that had been sent for parties, balls and dinners, all to come off after New-year's, and expressed her delight that "dear Musa" had arrived in good time to attend them all.

And when the eager, enthusiastic girl stopped to take breath, Mrs. Shrewsbury put in her word and told of the perfect renovation of the house in Vermont Avenue, and of the perfect beauty of the new upholstery and decorations, and of the preparations she had made for the Christmas festivities and the New-year's reception.

To all of which Musa listened so quietly, that at length Mrs. Shrewsbury, after gazing at her attentively, broke forth with:

"My dear, what is the matter with you? I never knew you to be so still. And now that I look at you, I see that you are paler and thinner than I ever saw you. Are you not feeling well?"

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"Yes, Mrs. Shrewsbury, I am perfectly well; only wearied with my journey, that is all," answered Musa.

"To be sure, it *is* a long, tiresome ride, and then you cannot even get a good cup of tea to refresh you. But never mind; you shall have a treat in tea as soon we get to the house—Orange Pekoe, my dear. But, by the way, my dear, where *is* Cassy? And why didn't you bring her back with you?" Mrs. Chief-Justice ended by inquiring.

Musa had prepared herself for such questioning, so she answered calmly:

"I left Cassy in New York, in charge of my rooms there, which I have not yet given up, because I have left some very valuable effects there, and because I want to have a home of my own in the city to go to, whenever I may wish to run on for a little shopping during the winter."

"A very good plan, my dear," said Mrs. Shrewsbury.

And what further she might have said was stopped by the drawing up of the carriage before the house on Vermont Avenue.

That evening, after tea, Musa said to Mrs. Shrewsbury:

"Do you expect any one this evening?"

"Yes, my dear, we have always company in the evening. You know the regular days for receptions have not been set by any one yet, nor will be until after New-year; so, you see, just now people call promiscuously. You must fix upon your own day, you know. And you had better do it at once, so as to have your cards out in time."

"Let me see. I will set the same day of the week that Christmas and New-year come on this year—Wednesday," said Musa.

"Very well, my love. I will drive to Riordan's tomorrow, and give the order for the cards. And now,

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Clarice, my love, where are those invitations that have come for Miss Percie?"

"I will get them, mamma," answered the young lady, going to a large rack of ormolu, and bringing back a dozen or so of cards.

"I see," said Musa, after she had gone through the packet, "that all the ladies of the cabinet ministers, and all the ladies of the diplomatic corps, give balls in the course of the next three weeks, and no two balls fall upon the same evening. I wonder if these ladies held a diplomatic cabinet meeting, and came to an amicable understanding not to cross each other's evenings?"

"I don't know, my dear. I should not be surprised if such an understanding had been arrived at, in some mysterious manner, however. It looks like it," replied Mrs. Shrewsbury.

Callers began to drop in. Among the visitors who came late was one whom Musa had never seen before, and who was presented to her for the first time that evening as—

"Captain Howard, of the army."

He was a tall, dark-eyed and dark-complexioned young man, with fine features, framed in by silky curling black hair and whiskers.

Musa received him with the politeness due to a stranger and a visitor, but took no very special notice of him until the evening was half over, when all at once it occurred to her that he was paying very particular attentions to Clarice, and that these attentions seemed very acceptable to the young lady, and agreeable to her mamma.

And Musa felt pleased that her lovely little friend had such an eligible suitor; for she could trust the intuitions of Clarice to guide her in her selection of a lover morally and intellectually worthy of her love, and to the worldly

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wisdom of Mrs. Shrewsbury to direct her in her choice of a husband for her daughter, able to provide handsomely for his wife.

When the last guest had departed, Musa bade Mrs. Shrewsbury good-night, and called Clarice to accompany her to her room.

When they reached her chamber, Musa sent Servia to bed, and then took Clarice in her arms and kissed her tenderly and silently.

Clarice understood this, and burst into tears, and wept upon her friend's shoulder.

Musa kissed her again, and then softly inquired:

"Why do you weep so, my pet?"

"Oh, Musa, darling, I don't know unless it is because I am *so* happy. I never expected to be so happy in my life. I don't know what I have done to deserve it," said the girl, in deep, broken tones. And then she continued, rather incoherently:

"And oh, I don't know what he can see in me to make him love me so well; or what I have done to deserve so much happiness! And oh, dear Musa, please do not tell anybody what I have told you, for I think it is a sort of sacrilege to speak of it at all, and I would not speak of it to any one but you," said Clarice pleadingly.

"Of course I shall not, my love. But—what does your mother say to it all?"

"Oh, mamma favored it all along. He is an only son, and indeed an only child, and he is the sole heir to 'The Shoals.' He does not depend on the army for his living. 'The Shoals' is a fine old place. There is only one finer place on the sea-shore, and that is your old family seat, Musa—'Bay Beauty,' you know. And oh! indeed that is rightly named. For Bay Beauty is a Paradise, a heaven

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on earth. Don't you think so, Musa?" eagerly inquired the young girl.

"My dear, I have never seen it. I have never seen one of my plantations yet. And now, my darling, go to bed, and get a 'beauty sleep,' while you can, for it is nearly twelve o'clock," said Musa, kissing and dismissing her little friend.

When Musa found herself alone, the pathetic vision of her forsaken child swam in between her and all the splendor that surrounded her.

"This time last night, my little dark-eyed darling lay upon my bosom. And Heaven, who gave her to me—the sweetest treasure ever given—has not taken her from me, but *I* have cruelly left her. This morning I had her in my arms, and now I am two hundred miles away from her. And she might be ill to-night, and might even die and I not know it in time to go to her. Oh, why did I leave her? What is there in all this show, in all this mad orgie called 'society,' that is worth one meek, loving look from her dark eyes? Oh, that I had the wings of a dove, that I might fly to her to-night! Oh, that I were lying in that white bed in my room at Willow Cottage, with my baby on my bosom! I must go back to her. I must, I must," said the young mother, swaying up and down, as she wept bitterly.

After a time she wiped her eyes and went to bed.

The next day was Christmas eve, and a very busy day it was for all the inmates of the house on Vermont Avenue.

Immediately after breakfast, Mrs. Shrewsbury and Clarice whirled Musa away down to the French mantua-maker's, to consult about dress, and then to the stores to purchase velvets, satins, silks, laces, feathers, flowers, and

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all the regalia of a queen of fashion ; and lastly to the engraver's, to have cards of reception struck off.

And in the hurry and confusion of the day the vision of her child was lost.

But in the silence of the night and the stillness of her chamber, the beautiful, sorrowful vision came again, and melted her heart with its meek pathos.

On Christmas morning she went to church, accompanied by Mrs. and Miss Shrewsbury.

And after the services she was warmly welcomed by the many friends she met there.

In the evening Mr. Locke came to dinner. And a few minutes after his entrance he found an opportunity of placing in her hands a letter from New York, which, he said, had been forwarded to him from the office of Mr. I. V. Haughton, of Judiciary Place.

Musa thanked him earnestly, and stole away to her own room to read his letter. It was directed to "Mrs. Mary White, care of Mr. I. V. Haughton," and marked, "to be forwarded."

Musa opened it hastily and with a beating heart, and found, as she had expected to find, that it was from Mrs. Seaforth, who wrote according to promise, and said that little Musette was in perfect health and happiness, and was faithfully attended by her nurse, and constantly watched over by herself and old Cassy. And that she should continue to write according to promise three times every week, to keep Mrs. White posted in regard to the child's condition.

Musa's heart was lighter after reading this letter. And again she felt thankful that the babe of two months old was still too young to miss its mother, and that it was in such good hands.

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Musa went down-stairs feeling happier than she had felt since her arrival at home.

On the morning of the next day Musa wrote to Mrs. Seaforth, thanking her for her prompt letter, urging her still to be punctual in writing on every alternate day, and inclosing as a Christmas present a hundred dollar note. Poor mother! although she felt compelled to leave her baby, she was anxious to bribe every one around its cradle to be good to it. This letter she sent, under cover, to Mr. Haughton, to be forwarded.

On the Saturday of Christmas week there were two arrivals at the house on Vermont Avenue: Mrs. Kate Carew, from Richmond, Virginia, and Miss Armida Sutton, from Montgomery, Maryland.

Musa received them both with great kindness, and expressed her pleasure that they had arrived in time for the festivities of the first of January.

Four days after this, the New-year's reception held by Mrs. Chief-Justice Shrewsbury and Miss Percie came off, and was pronounced to have been the most largely attended and most brilliant entertainment of the kind that had been seen in Washington for many years.

And thus Musa was launched into the dazzling, dangerous whirlpool of society for her second season.

But with one fatal secret to guard, and with one deadly enemy on the watch, how would end this season of delirious pleasure and boundless adulation?

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CHAPTER XII.

THE TRAIL OF THE SERPENT—THE MASK BALL.

THE season was one of unexampled brilliancy, and Musa Percie was certainly the most splendid star in that constellation of beauty and fashion called "Society," at the National Capital.

For to escape thought, which was agony, she threw herself madly into the maelstrom of worldly pleasures.

She went to all the most exclusive parties given by the ladies of the cabinet ministers and of the corps diplomatique.

And everywhere the magnificence of her toilets and the splendor of her jewels, no less than her peerless beauty and sparkling wit, rendered her the most celebrated belle of her day.

But yet Musa's life was not destined to be all a triumph.

Black envy was on her track, and envy begets hatred, and hatred malice, and all malicious and murderous words and deeds.

She was watched by an implacable foe. Every word, deed and gesture were noted by one whose sole aim in life was to get power over her. Why did Armida Sutton hate Musa Percie, and seek to ruin her? Hatred, like love, often exists without apparent cause. Armida envied Musa's beauty, genius, wealth, and, above all, her high social position.

She saw herself, fair as she was, only the foil of Musa's

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splendor—the pale pearl set to heighten the brilliance of the burning ruby—the insignificant attendant on this queen of beauty and fashion—politely ignored and unconsciously slighted—and she hated Musa with the deadly hatred of foiled ambition, envy and jealousy.

If the world knew what she had discovered! But the world would not believe such monstrous facts without proofs. Armida Sutton had no proofs. And it was now the first object of her life to obtain them.

For this she furtively watched Musa. She often saw Mr. Locke quietly slip a letter into Musa's hand, with which that lady would hurry to her room, from which she would return radiant.

She noticed that these letters brought by Mr. Locke, and silently handed to his late ward, were the only ones that Musa never read aloud, and never quoted to her companions—the only ones that she ever carried away to read in privacy, and from the reading of which she always came back looking so well satisfied.

Armida Sutton determined, by fair means or foul, to get possession of these letters, or at least of one of them.

One morning, early in February, she was alone in the small parlor used as a sitting-room by the family, when Mr. Locke was announced. He entered with a letter in his hand, which he held so that the superscription could not be read.

"Good-morning, Miss Sutton. I hope Miss Percie is visible this morning?" he said, bowing with formal, old-fashioned courtesy.

"I regret to say that she is not. She is resting in her room, after the fatigue of the ball at the Belgian minister's last night."

"Oh! balls, balls, balls! You young people work harder

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at pleasure than we old fogies of the forum do at our profession. You will send some one to let Miss Percie know that I am here, I hope, Miss Sutton. I have a letter for her," said the lawyer, seating himself.

"Oh, if you have a letter for Musa, I can take it up myself, and at the same time I can ascertain if Musa can come down to see you," said Armida eagerly.

"Thanks, no," replied the lawyer, rising and touching a bell.

A footman entered, by whom he sent a message up to Miss Percie to the effect that he had called to see her on business.

In a few moments Musa Percie came down, in an elegant morning dress.

"Why, I thought that you were asleep, dear," exclaimed Armida Sutton, in well-feigned surprise.

"Oh no, I was only resting on the sofa.—My dear Mr. Locke; how glad I am to see you!" said Musa, first answering Armida, and then turning cordially to the visitor.

"I have brought you another letter concerning the investment in the new railroad stock of which I spoke to you," said the lawyer, rising and handing her the note that he had brought.

Armida Sutton watched the transfer from hand to hand, and noticed that the lawyer gave it and the lady received it so as to keep the superscription out of sight.

Mr. Locke immediately took leave, and Musa hurried upstairs to read her letter.

But not as on previous occasions, did she return radiant from that reading.

She did not make her appearance until the luncheon hour, when she came to the table looking pale, anxious,

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and maintaining during the meal an absent and preoccupied manner. When it was over she suddenly said:

"I am going to New York by the night train."

There was a simultaneous exclamation of astonishment from all the ladies present.

And then came individual questions and remarks.

"Why, how very sudden, my love! I had no idea that you intended to go to New York at all. And to take a notion of going at once, and by the night train too, is—*eccentric*, to say the least," argued Mrs. Shrewsbury.

"You know that I *am* a little eccentric, Mrs. Shrewsbury, being very impulsive. If I took a fancy to start for Grand Cairo to-morrow morning, believe me, I should do it, or go mad if anybody tried and succeeded in preventing me. So I am going to New York by the night train, and I would go even if I were certain there would be a fatal railway accident," said Musa grimly.

And at six o'clock that evening Musa Percie started, alone and unattended, for New York.

An hour later, Mrs. and Miss Shrewsbury and Mrs. Carew set off for the National Theatre, where they had a box for the evening, to see the elder Booth, in his great character of Richard the Third.

Miss Sutton, who was to have been of the party, pleaded a slight headache, and preferred to stay home.

No sooner had the party left the house than Armida went up-stairs and procured from her own room a large bunch of keys of various sizes, with which she had provided herself from a locksmith's some days before, and with these she crossed the hall and entered Musa's deserted suite of rooms.

The shutters were already closed and the curtains drawn. And the gas was burning low.

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Armida first secured all the doors, and hung a towel over each key-hole. Then she turned up the gas, and cut the string of her bunch of keys and spread them out on the top of the bureau for more convenient use.

Then she took them up one by one, and tried them in the bureau locks. And at length, after trying some fifteen or twenty, she found one that fitted.

She unlocked the upper drawer and drew it out.

There was nothing in it but fine laces, rich ribbons and fragrant sachets.

She tried the key on the second drawer and successfully opened that.

And there she found some boxes of handkerchiefs and cases of gloves.

And hidden under one of the boxes, as if it had been hastily stowed away, she found the letter that had been brought to the house that morning by Mr. Locke.

She pounced upon it eagerly, breathlessly, like a cat that had caught a mouse after a long chase.

For a moment she stood panting and gazing on the black-edged envelope, with her blue eyes blazing with baleful triumph.

Next she noiselessly glided to all the doors in turn, to make doubly sure that they were secured against intruders and blinded against spies.

Then, with the mysterious letter clutched tightly in her hand, she glided back to the gas-burners that were near the dressing-table, and looked at the face of the envelope.

It was postmarked "Harlem, N. Y.," and it was directed to "Mrs. Mary White, care of I. V. Haughton, Esq., Attorney-at-law, No 8 Judiciary Place, New York City."

"Ah!" muttered Armida Sutton, as she read this superscription, "Mrs. Mary White! So this is the name you

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go by at your lodgings in New York, of which old Cassy has the charge. And I. V. Haughton is your agent there, as old Lyttleton Locke is here. I wonder if they both are in your full confidence? I doubt it very much. I suspect that both are blind instruments in your hands, Miss Percie. But in any case, lawyers, like doctors, are bound to keep secrets," she added, as she sat down gloating over her prey, and opened the letter and read as follows:

"WILLOW COTTAGE, HARLEM, Feb. 7, 18—.

MY DEAR MRS. WHITE: I am very sorry to have to inform you that little Musette is very ill. She was taken in the night with a sore throat. I sent for the doctor early this morning, and he has been here and prescribed for her. But as yet she is no better. I write this by the very first mail since she was taken ill. Old Cassy, who is very experienced in children's illness, thinks you had better hurry up here at once. In the meantime, believe me, dear Mrs. White, I will do all that I can for your dear baby, as if she was my own child. And I remain truly yours, MARGARET SEAFORTH."

"What a discovery!" exclaimed Armida Sutton. "I might have known it. I *did* know it, intuitively. Why should I be surprised to have my intuitive knowledge confirmed by external facts? This accounts, as I knew it would, for her prolonged and mysterious absence in New York, and for her retained lodgings there left in the charge of old Cassy. I never could get from her the locality of those lodgings. Whenever I asked her, she laughed and said that they were pleasantly situated at No. Naught, corner of Blank Avenue and Star Street, or some nonsense of that sort."

Here a slight noise near the door arrested this detective's attention, and she arose and stole on tiptoe to the spot, and listened. But all was still.

"It was a mouse," she said to herself, as she returned to

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the bureau. She cautiously locked the drawer, restored everything to its external look of order, and then turned down the gas, and taking the stolen letter with her, left the room.

She went down-stairs, with her heart still beating fast. She wondered how long it would be before the ladies would come in from the theatre. And then she went into the library to look at the mantel clock there. The hands were just on the stroke of nine.

She determined to retire, and went up-stairs. On reaching her room, she put away the stolen letter into a safe place, and then undressed herself and went to bed.

At half-past ten the ladies returned from the theatre, and were admitted by the sleepy little page.

They came up at once to Armida's room, and expressed regret that they found her so much worse than they had left her.

"We came home as soon as the tragedy was over. Nothing worth seeing after Old Booth in the last act of Richard!" said Kate Carew.

"Certainly not," assented Armida.

And then, from fear of fatiguing her, they bade her good-night, and left her to repose. And Armida, in whom the animal nature largely preponderated, soon went to sleep, notwithstanding her mental disturbances.

The next morning she arose early and joined the family at breakfast, declaring herself to be fully recovered from her indisposition of the previous evening.

That day Mrs. Shrewsbury and Mrs. Carew went down together to the capitol to hear Henry Clay deliver his famous speech on the tariff.

Clarice Shrewsbury stayed at home, and shut herself up in her own room to write out all those excuses that she had

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promised Musa to send in her name to the houses where she would be due during the next two weeks.

And while Clarice was doing this, Armida, dressed to receive any chance visitor, remained in the drawing-room. Several called in the course of the forenoon. And every one inquired for Miss Percie. And all were told, with a meaning shrug of the shoulders, that Miss Percie had started off on one of her sudden unaccountable visits to New York, and that no one in the house had any idea she intended to go until about an hour or two before she started.

Visitors expressed their surprise. Armida replied by a shrug of her shoulders, and a slight elevation of her eyebrows. And these visitors went away wondering what was wrong with the beautiful Miss Percie. To other visitors, who came later, Miss Sutton, in answer to inquiries made for the young mistress of the house, threw out stronger hints. And these visitors also went away mystified and suspicious.

At length there came, rather late, a gay and pretty young married woman, who was known to be a rival of Miss Percie, as a would-be leader of society.

There was no other visitor at the time of her entrance, and no one else in the drawing-room except Armida Sutton, who arose and received this lady with much affectionate *empressement.*

"My *dear* Mrs. Montgomery Jones, I am *so* glad to see you! It has been such an age since you were here. Do take this low easy-chair by the fire," said Miss Sutton, drawing forward the most luxurious seat in the room.

And then ensued the interchange of "airy nothings," commonly called conversation, until at length Mrs. Montgomery Jones inquired for Miss Percie.

Then Armida grew suddenly very grave, and laid her hand meaningly on that of the visitor, and whispered:

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"Oh, Mrs. Jones, I am in so much trouble about Musa!"

"Ah!" exclaimed the lady, all agog to hear any ill news concerning her envied rival.

"Oh, Mrs. Jones, if I tell you something, will you promise me never, *never* to breathe it to any other human being?" continued Armida impressively.

"Certainly I will promise. You may rely on me for keeping any secret intrusted to me, my dear Miss Sutton," said the visitor, with suppressed eagerness.

"Well, I hope I am not doing wrong, but indeed I don't know *what* I ought to do, and I need your counsel. You are a married lady, and of course you have some experience," said Armida, affecting to hesitate.

"I will tell you what you ought to do first of all, my dear girl," said the lady seriously.

"What is that?" inquired Armida anxiously.

"You ought to confide in me at once. For how can I counsel you until I know what your difficulty is?" gravely inquired the lady.

"Very true. And, oh, dear, it is of Musa I must speak! poor, dear, beautiful, willful Musa!" said Armida, putting her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Yes, my darling; take courage. Go on," said the lady.

"Well, then, Mrs. Jones, I suppose you heard it reported last winter, that the young Earl of Cressy, the son of the Duke of Montcalla, and Miss Percie were engaged to be married, did you not?"

"Yes, dear."

"Well, you are aware that he returned to England without marrying her."

"Certainly. And he is dead, is he not?"

"Yes; but what I wish to call your attention to, is the

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hard fact that he returned to England without marrying her."

"Yes, I see. Go on."

"Well, then, Mrs. Jones, I fear that—— Oh, please, do not ever breathe what I am going to tell you to any human being!"

"Oh, no; I will not indeed. Why do you distrust me?" impatiently inquired the lady.

"I don't distrust you, my dear Mrs. Jones. But this is such a terrible thing to tell, that I feel I cannot caution you too much. Well, my dear lady, I fear there was something worse, much worse than a broken marriage engagement between Musa Percie and the boy Earl," said Armida solemnly.

The visitor drew back and caught her breath. This was more evil than she had ever hoped to hear.

The two women gazed at each other for a moment, and then Mrs. Jones stooping forward, whispered:

"You don't mean to say——" and paused.

"Yes, I do," muttered Armida.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the lady.

"Mind, I am not quite certain about it," explained Armida, who meant in this case to be a very slow poisoner of her friend's reputation. "I am not quite certain; for if I had been quite certain, I should not have remained under her roof for an hour afterward. But I have suspicions so well grounded that they almost amount to certainty. And I wished to ask you, dear Mrs. Jones, what I had best do. Of course I cannot ask counsel of Mrs. Shrewsbury, or of Mrs. Carew, for if I were to drop a hint of the true state of affairs—or what I suspect to be the true state of affairs—to either of those ladies, they would leave the house immediately, and so Musa would be ruined. Yet they are ma-

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trons, and can afford to risk something by staying. But I am a young girl, and all my future prospects may be blighted by my remaining under Musa Percie's roof, if my suspicions should prove to be well founded. Now what I wish to know is, whether I should be justified in leaving this house upon my suspicions only?"

"My dear," said the lady thoughtfully, "I must go home and reflect upon this before I can venture to give you any counsel."

"But oh! please, *please* do not breathe this matter to a living soul!" pleaded Armida, clasping her hands.

"I have given you my word of honor that I will not, my dear. And now, good-bye, darling, for I really must be off," said Mrs. Jones, rising, and taking leave, for she was very anxious to get away, in order to be the first to whisper this momentous secret confidentially into the ear of her own most intimate friend, just as Armida hoped and believed that she would do.

Armida's blue eyes flashed under their golden eyelashes.

"There, that is started! She will whisper that confidentially to a dozen people before she goes home to-day. But what if at last it should be traced back to me? Well, I have not said anything positive, and therefore nothing actionable. Let me see what I did say. Ah! I only said that I greatly feared there had been something much worse than a broken marriage engagement between Musa Percie and the boy Earl of Cressy. Safe!"

Meanwhile Musa Percie—suspecting nothing of the evil story set in circulation about herself, and now incapable of caring, even if she had known all about it—sped northward under an intense strain of suspense that can be appreciated only by one who, like herself, had been suddenly

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called to go a journey to the sick or dying bed of some beloved relative or friend.

Fast as the lightning train flew, it could not fly so fast as her tortured spirit flew before it.

Every minute seemed an hour, and every hour a week, to her agonized heart.

She spent the long hours of that heavy night in anguish, or in agonizing prayer.

Musa Percie had been religiously trained from her infancy up, and had "lived in all the ordinances of the Church blameless."

Yet, perhaps, in all her previous life, she had never prayed so earnestly for anything, as she now prayed for the life of her child.

She waked and prayed while her travelling companions nodded and snored around her.

So the awful night came to an end at last.

And just as the faint crimson streaks in the east were heralding the rising sun, the train "slowed" into its station at Jersey City.

She got out, and hurried to the ferry-boat, that was just putting off from its pier.

When she reached the city and arrived at the foot of Courtland street, she selected the hack that had the most able looking horses, and told the hackman that she would pay him double fare, if he would drive her as fast as possible to Harlem.

The man, stimulated by the promise of reward, jumped upon the box and put his horses to their best speed.

The sun was not more than half an hour high when they turned into One Hundred and Twenty-second street and drew up before Willow Cottage.

Musa thrust a ten-dollar note in the driver's hand, and

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telling him to keep the change, jumped out of the carriage and ran wildly in at the cottage gate.

She threw a hasty glance at the door, to see if there was any black gauze there, tied with white ribbon.

No, there was none. Thank Heaven! the child was still living!

She pushed open the door, that was not locked, and rushed into the passage and up the stairs without seeing any one.

As she pushed open the door of her own room, she heard the voice of her child, crowing and laughing.

Oh, music, sweeter than the music of the spheres, to the mother's ears!

And at the same time she caught sight of her child, sitting naked in its little warm bath before the fire, paddling and screaming with delight, as it splashed the water about. Oh, sight fairer than visions of Paradise to the mother's eyes!

The revulsion of feeling was almost too much for her.

With one great sob of—

"Oh, thank Heaven!" she dropped down by the side of the little one, and found relief in a great burst of tears.

The baby stopped splashing and laughing, to sit and gaze at her.

"Oh, my darling! my darling! My darling! my darling! are you alive?" she cried, sobbing aloud and dropping tears like rain.

She saw neither the nurse nor the landlady nor the old negro woman, all of whom were in the room. She saw nothing but the child in the little bath-tub over which she was weeping until old Cassy suddenly said:

"Look a here, honey, dat water 's plenty salt nuff dout you pouring so many tears inter it!"

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"Oh, Cassy," cried her mistress, smiling through her tears, "how good is Heaven to me! To think I should find her so bright and well, when I feared to find her dying, or even dead! Oh, what joy! Oh, Cassy, how did it happen?"

"See, honey, de chile had somefin like de croup, and was sick enough, *I* tell *you*, when Mrs. Seafoot write to you. 'Deed, we all tought she gwine die. But, lor, 'fore night she was all ober it. And nex' day—dat was yes'day—she was well 's ever she was. But lor, honey, dat 's de way long o' chillun. Scares you most to deff, finking der gwine to die ebery minit one day, and laughin' at you de nex', 'specially when it 's der troats ails 'em. But lor, honey, an't you gwine to speak to nobody else?" said Cassy, by way of a reminder to her young mistress.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Mrs. Seaforth and Mrs. Morris. How do you both do? I am sure you will excuse my seeming rudeness. I am almost crazed with joy to find my child so well," said Musa, offering her hand in turn to each of the women, who were smiling in sympathy with her gladness, and who now heartily congratulated her on the child's recovery.

"Why, my dear ma'am, she was as well as she is now before my letter got to you," said Mrs. Seaforth.

"And now, little Missy, it is just about time for you to stop sloppin' water about, and to come out o' your baff. She been in dere ten minutes, honey, and dat 's long 'nough," said Cassy, attempting to raise the child.

"No, no, don't you! Let me," said Musa, rising and whirling off her mantle and hat, and seating herself in her low nursing chair. "Bring me her bathing blanket and soft towels, and I will dry her and dress her myself."

"Seems to me you better go to bed and sleep, after

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travellin' all night, honey," suggested Cassy, as she handed the required articles.

"Yes, I will, after I have wiped and clothed my baby, my darling, my pet, so that I can take her to bed with me," said the happy mother, as she lifted the crowing and laughing child from the bath, and dried and dressed it amid enraptured caresses and kisses.

While she was at this pleasant task, Mrs. Seaforth slipped away down-stairs, and prepared a delicate breakfast of tea and toast and poached eggs, for the traveller.

And Cassy laid out a change of dress, and put fresh towels on the wash-stand, and fresh water in the ewers.

And then every one in Willow Cottage did their best to give the young mother a comfortable as well as a happy home-coming.

After Musa had dressed her baby, and kissed her a score of times, she put her in the arms of her nurse to be fed, and then she washed the railroad dust from her own face and head, and changed her dress, and went down to breakfast.

And after breakfast, she took her child to her own peaceful bosom, and lay down with it to sleep.

So great was the reaction from the fatigue and excitement of her journey, that she fell asleep and slept profoundly for about two hours, when at length she was sweetly awakened by soft touches of her baby's fingers on her face.

She awoke from her dreamless sleep to see the little face smiling into hers.

"Oh! is it true? Is it possible, my darling, that I have you still, when I so little deserve you? Oh, thank Heaven, thank Heaven. I will try to be a better Christian, to lead a better life. I will be good to all poor little children for

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your sake, my little love, my little sweet love;" and so prattling tender nonsense to the baby, amid tears and smiles, Musa came fully to herself, and got up and gave little Musette to her foster-nurse.

So full of joy and gratitude was the young mother's heart that it expanded with charity toward all the world, and especially toward little children.

The next day she drove to New York and made a "thank-offering," an anonymous donation of a thousand dollars, to the Children's Hospital.

And the same day she stopped at one of the best hotels and engaged a room, from which she wrote a letter jointly to Miss Sutton and Miss Shrewsbury, telling them that she should stay in New York for two weeks longer, and that she wished to make them both presents of their costumes for the coming *bal masque*, and if they would choose their characters and send their bust and waist measures, she would order their dresses from the Messrs. Mufti, the celebrated costumers. She concluded by saying:

"You must make the most of this ball, my dear girls; for I think it will be the very last that I shall give. I am growing sick and tired of these splendid vanities; and if I were not irrecoverably committed to this one, by the invitations I have sent out, I should not give it. And the only consideration that reconciles me to the necessity now, is, that you, my dear girls, and many other young people, will greatly enjoy it. And therefore fix upon the characters you shall take, and send me your measures without delay. Address me at this house."

Musa sealed and sent this letter, and returned to Willow Cottage, to the delightful smiles and caresses of her child, her little Musette, who was every day growing in grace and beauty.

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Time sped rapidly with Musa. In addition to the delight she took with her babe, she became deeply interested in little Sam Seaforth, and made a financial arrangement with his mother that would enable Sam to quit selling newspapers and go to school.

The days passed swiftly, until less than a week remained of Musa's time of staying in New York. This was Tuesday, the fifteenth, and she was due in Washington on the morning of the twenty-second, for on the evening of that day her mask ball was to come off.

She could not fatigue herself by travelling at night, so she decided to go on to Washington by the early train on Monday, the twenty-first, so as to have a good rest before the ball.

Mufti, the costumer, had engaged to send the dresses for herself and friends on by express on that day, also.

Thus she had but five working days to do all that was to be done before leaving New York.

And first she had to see her new protégé, Sam Seaforth, entered in the public school. So, on Wednesday morning, she went with him to his new school-room, and saw him fairly embarked on the river of Knowledge.

When she returned to Willow Cottage, she handed Mrs. Seaforth twenty dollars in advance, as a month's compensation for the lost services of the lad she had put to school.

After this matter was satisfactorily settled, Musa sat for some moments in deep thought, and finally she said:

"The teacher's face haunts me. His name is Wilks—the Rev. Mr. Wilks, a retired preacher, from Virginia last, but formerly of this place. So he told me, in a short talk we had together. I feel sure that I have seen him before, but where I cannot tell. I thought so when I met him

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this morning, and the conviction has grown on me ever since."

Whether Musa Percie had really ever met him before or not, he was, unconsciously, very much mixed up in her own secret history.

For he was that very Parson Wilks who, twelve months before, had been a travelling preacher in Virginia, and who had accidentally struck the trail of Kate Carew's crime.

The remainder of this week Musa devoted to her child, and on Monday morning she left New York by the early train for Washington.

The sun was setting as the train glided into the depot at Washington.

Clarice Shrewsbury had come alone in the carriage for Musa, and she met her with effusion.

They were scarcely seated alone in the carriage, and the horses had but just started, when Clarice threw her arms around Musa's neck, exclaiming:

"Oh, my dear Musa, as Mary Queen of Scots, you will have quite a court. Not only your four Marys, but all your court! What character do you think mamma is going to take, for instance?"

"I am sure I don't know. Queen Elizabeth?"

"Oh, no; she is going to take the character of Margaret Douglass, Countess of Lennox, the aunt and afterward the mother-in-law of the queen—the mother of Henry Lord Darnley, you know."

"Yes, yes. We shall have quite a drama! If I had only known, I could have had your mother's dress made up in New York."

"I think you have had quite enough dresses made for us. And mamma's dress will be quite right. She consulted the book of costumes in the Congressional library,

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and has really made out a very handsome and quite correct dress, I think. You will see it. And here we are at the house," said Clarice, as the carriage drew up before the door.

Musa was warmly welcomed home. She retired early. The next day was a busy one. Not for Musa or for her young friend, however. They remained in their rooms, as far as possible from the scene of confusion. But for Mrs. Shrewsbury and Mrs. Carew, who superintended the construction of wreaths, festoons, baskets, and bouquets of fresh flowers, with which the rooms were decorated until they looked like vast paradisiacal bowers of fragrance and beauty.

It was late in the afternoon when at length the decorations were completed, and the *débris* cleared away.

And then the gas was lighted for a minute, that the general effect might be seen. It was beautiful beyond description.

It had been arranged that Musa and the ladies of her household, in full evening dress, and without masks, should receive their guests until all should have arrived. And that then they should, one by one, slip away and assume the masquerade costume.

So, at nine o'clock, the hour for which the invitations had been issued, Mrs. Shrewsbury, Mrs. Carew, Musa, Armida and Clarice stood grouped in the first drawing-room to welcome all comers. The maskers were of course to be announced in their assumed, and not in their real characters.

The first arrival was a tall personage clothed in white from head to foot, and wearing a snow-white mask. He was announced as "The White Domino." He bowed in silence over the offered hand of his hostess and passed up

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the room. He had scarcely disappeared when "Bluff King Hal" was announced. And a Falstaffian gentleman in the magnificent costume of Henry the Eighth entered, bowed clumsily, and passed on.

"Pharold the Gipsy," was the next arrival. "Queen Bess" followed. "A Beggar-girl" appeared. And the maskers came so fast that the receiving ladies could scarcely catch their names as they bowed, and were forced on by the inpouring crowd behind them.

By ten o'clock the rooms were all filled, and as the arrivals had fallen off, Musa and her young friends withdrew to assume their masquerade dresses, leaving Mrs. Shrewsbury and Mrs. Carew standing there to receive any late guests who might happen to come.

Half an hour later a distinguished party, peerless in the beauty of their persons and the splendor of their costumes, were prepared to make a grand *entrée:* the Queen of Scots and her four beautiful maids of honor, Mary Seaton, Mary Livingston, Mary Beaton, and Mary Fleming.

I really must describe them, as they stood in the front hall, under the full blaze of the gasilier, ready to pass into the first drawing-room.

First stood Musa, dressed as Mary Stuart. Her costume was magnificent, almost beyond painting. She wore an underskirt of cloth of gold, marked off in squares by lines of seed pearls. And within each square were the royal emblems of three nations, the rose of England, the thistle of Scotland and the fleur-de-lis of France, worked in precious stones corresponding in color with the flowers they represented. A stomacher of cloth and gold studded with precious stones covered her chest. Open over this splendid dress she wore a train of scarlet velvet, embroidered all over with gold and pearls. Sleeves of scarlet velvet, embroidered

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with gold and pearls, and lined with cloth of gold, hung open from her shoulders. Inner sleeves of cloth of gold covered her arms. On her head she wore the elegant Mary Stuart hood or cap of scarlet velvet, embroidered with gold and pearls, and with its heart-shaped front edged with a row of large pearls. And from the back of that hood descended a long veil of the finest white gauze, edged and lightly embroidered in gold. On her neck and on her wrists she wore her richest jewels. White gloves, embroidered in gold and pearls, covered her hands, and scarlet boots, similarly decorated, encased her feet. In her hand she carried a bouquet composed of the emblematic flowers, the rose, thistle, and fleur-de-lis, in a holder of gold and precious stones.

Her four attendants were as beautifully though not as splendidly dressed.

They all wore white satin underskirts, embroidered in silver, with bodices of the same. But their trains and sleeves were all different.

Clarice, as Mary Livingston, wore a blue satin train, embroidered with white floss silk, and trimmed with swan's-down, and sleeves and hood to match.

Armida, as Mary Seaton, wore a green satin train, embroidered with silver, and sleeves and hood to match.

Molly Dowling, as Mary Beaton, wore a rose-colored satin train, embroidered with silver, and sleeves and hood of the same. And Alice Seymour, as Mary Fleming, wore a pale mauve satin train, embroidered with silver, with sleeves and hood to correspond.

As this superb party appeared at the door, the well-trained usher announced, according to the custom of Queen Mary's time:

"Her Highness, the Queen of Scots."

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They entered and passed up the hall, amid the silence of a sensation that was at first too profound for utterance.

No one, except Mrs. Shrewsbury and Mrs. Carew, who still stood to receive, knew who they were. And they affected to receive them as guests.

As they passed up the room, a low murmur of admiration and wonder stole upon the silence, and soon filled the crowd like the murmur of the sea.

They took seats on a sofa at the upper end of this first drawing-room, and sat there to observe the motley crowd before them.

This room was not unpleasantly thronged. Eight large rooms were thrown open to the guests, and they were very equally distributed among them.

Four of these rooms, on the opposite side of the hall, had been so constructed that by sliding-doors they could be thrown into one, forming a vast saloon or ball-room, for the accommodation of the dancers.

The other four rooms, in the first of which Musa and her party now sat, communicated by broad, open doors, and were left to the convenience of those who preferred to sit and converse, or walk around and observe. The supper-rooms were on the floor above.

Musa and her party sat looking on for some time before any one ventured to come up and address them; for, as I mentioned before, no one knew who they were.

The scene was a strange and interesting one, more like "the bright pageant of a midnight dream" than any reality.

There were kings and queens, lords and ladies, knights and squires, of all ages and nations, "gorgeously" arrayed in velvets, satins, ermines, plumes and precious stones, or in imitations much more brilliant than realities.

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There were popes and priests, monks and nuns, pilgrims and novices, venerable and holy in appearance.

There were flower girls and broom girls and gipsy girls and peasant girls, and all manner of fantastic girls, much finer than their models could ever have afforded to be.

"Think," said little Clarice, criticising an elegantly dressed "Cherry ripe," who was carrying her basket of wax morelloes, and singing her song very prettily—"only think of a fruit girl going about in a rose-colored silk skirt, a blue velvet bodice, and a Tuscan straw hat, with a wreath of French flowers around it. It is absurd."

"No, it is all quite right. I like it. It is the fruit girl *idealized*. This is all an idealization of reality. These young creatures who take the characters of peasants, and while they keep the form of the costumes, use the most costly and beautiful materials, illustrate a truth that perhaps even they do not understand—the idealizing and beautifying of the real," said Musa.

As she spoke, a mask approached in the character of David Rizzio, musician to the Queen of Scots. This mask, plainly dressed in a black velvet doublet and hose, with a black hat and plume, approached very modestly, bringing a lute in his hands.

He knelt before the "queen," laid the lute at her feet, dropped his head on his bosom, and seemed to wait her commands in loving humility.

"Welcome, good Rizzio," said Musa, speaking in character. "Right welcome to our presence! Nay, man, take up thy lute! It is too excellent an instrument to be so cast down. Take up thy lute, good Rizzio, and give us a specimen of thy wondrous skill. Sing, good Rizzio! Sing!"

And the unknown bowed low in deep humility, took his

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lute, tuned it, and still kneeling, raised his voice in that most beautiful of all love songs, written and sung by David Rizzio to his royal mistress, Mary Stuart:

"Stars of my soul! the only eyes
On which I care to look."

The singer possessed a deep, full, melodious and most expressive voice; and as he sang, he not only entranced all the "court circle," but gathered a large crowd from the general company, who hung enraptured on his strains.

"Who *is* he? Who *can* he be?" whispered some, in the pauses of the song.

"No one seems to know. No one even guesses," answered others.

"It is some man who loves and adores the lady he is singing to," said almost everybody who heard and saw him.

And all resolved to watch for the unmasking at supper time, to discover the musician.

The singer finished his song amid the breathless silence of the profound impression he had made.

Before that silence could burst into loud applause, Musa, speaking and acting in character, bent forward very sweetly and graciously, and said:

"Thanks, good Rizzio. Your strains have delighted many. Receive, I pray thee, this chain, as a pledge of our esteem."

And she took from her neck a chain of gold and placed it with her own hands over his bowed head, and arranged it on the breast of his black velvet doublet.

David Rizzio, or the mask that represented him, bowed in reverent silence—bowed until his forehead touched the hem of her robe—and then arose, took up his lute, glided silently away, and was soon lost in the crowd.

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Then the spellbound audience burst from their entranced silence, and sent after him a volley of applause.

When this had subsided, Musa arose from her seat, saying:

"My lords and ladies, we will to the dance. My Lord of Leicester——"

The cavalier who answered to this title sprang nimbly forward, bowed deeply, and took her offered hand to lead her to the ball-room.

The ladies and gentlemen of her party followed in order.

The royal procession entered the ball-room, that looked like one vast floral temple, lighted by a hundred jets of gas, until it was as brilliant as noonday.

The music had ceased for a time, the dance was over, and the gentlemen were leading their partners to find seats.

But on the appearance of this royal procession, the band of music struck up "God save the Queen" with great spirit and enthusiasm.

It was an anachronism, but that was of little consequence in a masquerade.

And again there was a sensation. And the breathless silence of speechless wonder and admiration lasted until the music ceased. And then it broke into whispered questions of:

"Who is she?"

"Who can she be?"

"Oh! how magnificent!"

"How splendid! how dazzling!"

"Has no one any idea who she is?" inquired some.

"She may be our hostess," answered others.

"No, she cannot be. Miss Percie is in an ordinary

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evening dress, without a mask, and is receiving her guests in the front drawing-room," several explained.

And then there was silence, for the royal procession had advanced nearly to the middle of the long room.

Here Armida Sutton stealthily detached herself from the party, mingled with the nearest crowd, so as to escape unobserved, and so glided to a distant corner of the room, where she saw the White Domino standing apart.

She sank wearily into a seat, and beckoned to the solitary guest.

He came and stood before her, murmuring:

"Beautiful mask! thanks for your summons. I am here to do your pleasure. Will you honor me with your hand in the next dance?"

"Willingly, on one condition."

"Name it."

"You see that lady who is dressed as Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots?"

"Yes."

"She is moving toward a seat with her train of attendants. I shall return and join her immediately. When we are all seated, come and pay your respects to her, and then ask her this question in these words:

"'How is the little girl you left at Willow Cottage, Mrs. White?'"

"Is that her name—Mrs. White?"

"Oh, no; she will think you have mistaken her for some one else, you know. That will be the joke, you see!"

"Oh, yes, I see."

"Now I am going. Do as I tell you, for the fun of the thing, and I will dance with you directly after supper. There will be no more dancing until then, you know."

"Quite right. I understand," said the White Domino.

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Armida glided away again, lost herself in the crowd, and slipped into her place in the rear of the "royal" procession, before her absence had been discovered.

The party reached a sofa at the upper end of the room and sat down; Musa, "Queen Mary," sitting in the centre, the ladies of her train sitting beside her, and the cavaliers standing behind her. Among the latter was "David Rizzio," who leaned over the back of her sofa.

While the party sat thus agreeably chatting together, the White Domino approached and bowed.

"You are welcome, sir," said Musa, bowing in response.

"Thanks, Madam," answered the domino; and then he bowed again, and in a distinct voice inquired:

"How is the little girl you left at Willow Cottage?"

Musa started, with a slight cry, and then sank trembling back on her sofa.

But a light hand was laid on her shoulder from behind, and a soft voice murmured in her ear:

"Do not mind the coward, Lady Cressy. You *are* Lady Cressy. I have crossed the ocean to give you back that title, if you will take it. I think the company are moving to the supper rooms. Come, take my arm, and let me lead you thither."

With a supreme effort, Musa controlled her emotion, took the arm of her mysterious cavalier, and rising, said gayly:

"My lords and ladies, we will to supper."

She then, on the arm of "David Rizzio," led the way to the supper rooms, followed by the ladies and gentlemen of her *suite*.

When they reached the magnificent rooms, and gathered around the luxurious tables, the company laid aside their masks amid a general acclamation of merry recognition.

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Musa and her royal party were seated at the upper end of one table, where about fifty guests were accommodated.

At the signal for unmasking she turned her eyes on the only mask in which she was interested—that was "David Rizzio's."

He uncovered and bowed profoundly, as he revealed to her astonished gaze the face of Gilbert Caux, Earl of Cressy!

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CHAPTER XIII.

BERTIE TO THE RESCUE.

"LORD CRESSY!" exclaimed Musa, in surprise and delight.

"Bertie," he answered, with a smile.

"Dear Bertie, I am so glad to see you," she said, offering her hand.

"I do believe you are really and not conventionally pleased to welcome your old brother-in-law back," he replied, in a low tone.

"Indeed, yes," she answered cordially.

"And I—I am enchanted to hold your hand in mine once more," he murmured, as he pressed her delicate fingers before releasing them.

Meanwhile there was, at every table through the supper-room, the low murmur and soft laughter of the general recognition that follows the unmasking.

All eyes had turned first on her who had taken the character of the Queen of Scots. And a buzz of admiration ensued when, on the removal of her mask, the beautiful face of Musa Percie was revealed. And "Miss Percie," "Miss Percie," was passed from lip to lip.

"You have seen my friends already—Mrs. Shrewsbury, Miss Shrewsbury?" said Musa, indicating the ladies near.

"Yes, thanks; they received me. They passed me in,"

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said Lord Cressy, bowing to the ladies mentioned—"for I took a brother's privilege in coming uninvited," he added, with a smile.

"And I am so much obliged to you for doing so!" said Musa heartily. "Our masquerade would not have been complete without you. And now, what will you take? Montilano, our caterer, is rather celebrated for his suppers. Will you try some of the boned turkey, or paté de fois gras?" inquired Musa, turning her thoughts on hospitality.

"Thanks. I will take a glass of champagne—with you," said the young Earl, bowing.

The attentive waiter who stood behind them opened a fresh bottle, and filled two glasses.

"Will you pledge me to the success of my mission over here?" inquired Bertie in a low voice, as he raised his glass.

"Certainly, certainly. To the success of your mission!" answered Musa, raising her glass.

"What! blindly?" inquired Bertie.

"Yes, blindly, confidingly," answered Musa.

They bowed, and raised the glasses to their lips.

"Thanks, fair sister," said the young Earl, as he set his empty glass upon the table. "To-morrow—no, not to-morrow, for you will scarcely be visible—but on Thursday morning I will call to see you, and if you will then receive me, I will tell you the nature of my mission here."

"I will wait at home to see you on Thursday, dear Bertie," replied Musa.

"Again many thanks. Your friends are leaving the tables. Will you take my arm to the ball-room?" inquired Bertie.

"If you please."

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As they passed on, he bent and whispered:

"I hope you have *one* dance disengaged, that you will let me have."

"Dear Bertie, you will kindly excuse me. I shall not dance at all. You cannot think, Bertie, that my heart is in this scene? Ah, no! This life is forced upon me. And I have no excuse for withdrawing from it. For as I cannot prove my marriage, so I dare not proclaim my widowhood. Yet I do not forget it, Bertie," she added, with a sigh.

They walked on in silence, passing through the dancing-room on to the front drawing-room.

Musa, now that all were unmasked, moved about among her guests, still leaning on the young Earl's arm, and greeted cordially all who came in her way.

But she sometimes thought that there was a coolness in the manner of some of her guests toward herself, that she could feel without being able to comprehend.

"Strange," she said to herself, "that under my own roof, while partaking of my hospitality, and enjoying the pleasures I have provided for them, they should pretend to treat me with coldness. If they had no respect for me, they ought not to have entered my house; or, having entered it, they should treat its mistress with civility, or—leave the premises. It seems to me that honor would leave no other alternative. But I may be mistaken in them. I *must* be mistaken. My friends would never purposely be rude to me, in my own home."

Then came a keen pang of suspicion.

Had the fatal secret of Willow Cottage transpired? The mysterious White Domino, whoever he was, had certainly, by some inexplicable means, got a clue to it. Had he circulated his knowledge or his suspicion, whichever it might be?

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Had the memory of her terrible family tragedy been revived and talked over? Was she, for the first time, being pointed out to one and another as the daughter of that unfortunate Reginald Percie who——

Oh, horror! The bare thought turned her sick and faint.

"Bertie, the rooms are very close. Please give me your arm out to the piazza for a breath of air," she said.

Lord Cressy promptly complied with her request, and took her to the long piazza that lay between the rear of the house and the evergreen shrubberies.

They walked up and down in this retired place for a few minutes, and then Musa proposed that they should sit down and rest for a little while.

They sat on a bench just under the window, the Venetian blinds of which were closed, while the sash was open to admit air into the ball-room.

While they sat there in silence, listening to the music within, the band suddenly stopped playing, and the "set" being over, the dancers were all moving to their seats.

Three ladies placed themselves at the window behind which, on the piazza, Bertie and Musa were quietly seated.

The three within the window and the two without were so near that every word spoken by those within could be heard by the silent party without.

The three ladies seemed to be continuing a conversation previously commenced.

"No," said the first, "I never heard a word of it before this evening, else you may be sure I should not have come here myself, much less have brought my girls with me."

"Who told you?" inquired the second.

"Why, Mrs. Montgomery Jones. It was after they were

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all unmasked. She looked at Miss Percie, and whispered to me:

"'Well, if she must needs be a queen, why then, if all the evil spoken against Mary Stuart is true, she had better be *that* queen than any other.'"

"You don't say Mrs. Montgomery Jones said *that?* Why, what could she mean?" inquired the third lady.

But before she could be answered, another lady appeared upon the scene, saying:

"Why, don't you know? Haven't you heard? I don't believe a word of it myself, else I should not have countenanced her by coming here. But they *do* say that she and that young English lord who was over here about eighteen months ago, *ought* to have been married and *were not!*"

A murmur of horror-stricken propriety buzzed around.

And then the first lady spoke again, and said:

"And just think how she has been carrying on with his brother this very evening."

Here Lord Cressy hastily arose, saying:

"My dear Musa, let us leave this spot!"

"No," said Musa, who had been struck motionless with consternation by what she had heard, but who was now aroused by the action of Bertie—"No; let us confront these slanderers."

And she gently opened the shutters and stood face to face with the ladies within, saying quietly:

"Ladies, as your conversation was not intended for our ears, it is but right to let you know that we have inadvertently heard all that you have said. We are going now, however, and you can continue."

There was a panic within the window that no words can describe.

After the first scared, blank gaze of the culprits, there

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was a nervous flutter among them, as if they would have fled.

But before they could do so, Musa and her companion moved from the spot.

"Take me into the lilac walk, good Bertie, I am suffocating! I am suffocating! There it is on the right," said Musa.

It had cost her a great effort to speak and act with perfect calmness and dignity in confronting her slanderers, and now the reaction had come, and she was faint almost to the verge of swooning.

But the air was very refreshing, and she soon grew better.

"Oh, Bertie, what in the name of justice have I done to merit the enmity and animadversions of those women?" she inquired appealingly.

"What have you done, my fair friend?" repeated Bertie, with a light laugh and a look of amazement. "Why, what have you *not* done? You have done a thousand things to deserve the severest punishment at these people's hands."

"Bertie!"

"Yes, you have, and you know you have; so don't deny it."

"Why, Bertie!"

"In the first place, you are the most beautiful, graceful and accomplished woman of the day. And you ought to be imprisoned for life for 'doing' *that*. You dress with the most exquisite taste, wearing the richest raiment and the most splendid jewels. You ought to be led to the stake and burned for doing *that*. Lastly, you delight all eyes and win all hearts. And you ought to be consigned to eternal perdition for doing *that*. Now what have you

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got to say, why the sentence of the law should not be executed upon you forthwith?"

"Only that I deny the whole charge, your honor. I have never been guilty of the charms with which I stand indicted," replied Musa, recovering her spirits under the influence of Bertie's cheerfulness.

"Prisoner, you are contumacious. There is no use in you denying what has been proved. You have been convicted by a jury of worshipping men and envying women. And the sentence of the court is, that you go back to the house in my custody, and take a few turns through your crowd of guests," said Bertie, leading her toward the porch.

They entered, and made the tour of all the gayly-decorated, brilliantly-lighted and well-filled rooms.

Musa spoke to her guests, in passing, with all her usual grace and ease, and introduced the Earl to those whom they met, and who had not enjoyed his previous acquaintance.

But nowhere could they see the least trace of the White Domino who had accosted her before supper, or of either of the four women who had spoken evil of her in the window.

The gas was burning luridly in the approach of daylight when the party began to break up.

Singly and in groups the guests came to take leave of their hostess, and to express the pleasure they had enjoyed in the festivities of the evening.

The leave-taking alone of so large a crowd occupied more than an hour.

The young Earl stood his ground beside Musa like one of her suite, until the last guest had left.

Then he raised her gloved hand respectfully to his lips, bowed to her attendant ladies, and took his leave.

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The first rays of the rising sun were glancing through the closed shutters, as Musa, pale and tottering, left her seat, followed by all the ladies of her household.

"Take my arm, dearest; you are quite worn out," said Kate Carew, as she drew Musa's languid hand under her elbow and supported her from the room.

Clarice Shrewsbury would have followed, but Mrs. Carew stopped her, saying:

"You need not come, Clare, darling. I can take care of Musa."

And they passed alone through the deserted rooms and up the stairs, where they found a quiet haven in Musa's peaceful chamber.

That day all the weary members of the family spent in sleep, leaving the servants, with some help from the outside, to set the house in order.

Toward night one after another awoke, dressed and came down to the drawing-room.

Musa was the last to appear.

She found the drawing-room occupied by Mrs. Carew, Mrs. and Miss Shrewsbury, Miss Sutton, and two visitors —the only two whose intimate relations with the ladies of the household excused their intrusion at such a time. These were Captain Shrewsbury, the only son of Mrs. Chief-Justice, and Captain Howard, the betrothed lover of Clarice.

Musa welcomed these visitors with cordiality; but at the same time she felt pleased to find that the young Earl of Cressy had had the good taste to refrain from availing himself of the privilege conferred by his relationship to herself, of calling so soon after the fatiguing ball.

Tea was ordered to be served in the drawing-room. And Mrs. Shrewsbury, as usual, presided over the urn.

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"You scarcely saw my brother Philip last night, Musa, you were so much taken up with Lord Cressy. And, oh, I do want you to like him so much! And see! Armida has got perfect possession of him," whispered Clarice to her friend, as they sat sipping their tea together.

Musa followed the direction of her glance, and saw Captain Shrewsbury and Armida Sutton sitting side by side on an opposite sofa, with their tea-cups in their hands.

She had not particularly noticed the son of Mrs. Chief-Justice before, but now that Clarice had called attention to her beloved brother, Musa deigned to look at him critically.

And now she saw a tall, dark, handsome man, with jet-black hair and whiskers, and jet-black eyes and eyebrows, and with a very animated countenance and expressive smile.

His whole attention—to the great annoyance of his mother and sister—seemed devoted to Miss Sutton, who received it with more warm graciousness than her cold nature was apt to bestow on any one.

"Did you ever see anything like that in your life, Musa, dear?" fretfully commented Clarice. "Armida seems really warming to life under Philip's smile. I should not be surprised if she should even develop a soul under my brother's influence."

"That will be a match, my dear," said Musa.

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Clarice, setting down her tea-cup and starting for the opposite sofa to spoil the *tête-à-tête*.

But on her way she was interrupted by her own betrothed, who had been talking to Mrs. Carew, and who had just escaped in time to capture Clarice and carry her off to another cozy corner.

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Mrs. Carew came over and joined Musa.

"This drawing-room carpet is like a chess-board, and the people on it like chess-men. Only see how they are moved about. Look at the spoony corners. The lovers are 'planted unco right.' You will lose your pearl setting, I fear, my Ruby. They will soon be set separately, in circlets of gold commonly called wedding rings. Then what will my Ruby do?" she said, smiling on the young lady.

"Find other pearls," carelessly answered Musa, who was a very indifferent spectator to this scene.

But Mrs. Shrewsbury grew more and more annoyed at witnessing her son's undisguised admiration for the penniless beauty to whom he was devoting himself, when he might have been spending his time to so much greater advantage in paying court to the wealthy heiress.

So, when the clock struck ten, she boldly crossed the room to where her son was sitting beside Armida, and addressing him in a low tone of voice, said:

"My dear Philip, I don't want to turn you out, but really you know, under the circumstances——"

Before Mrs. Shrewsbury had done speaking, her son had risen, and now he stood up laughing and waiting to take his leave.

Of course, when Captain Shrewsbury arose to say good-night, Captain Howard immediately followed his example.

The ladies, left to themselves, soon separated and retired. And the perturbed household at length found repose.

The next morning, while Musa was sitting with Clarice, helping her to plan out her trousseau, Lord Cressy's card was brought to her.

She glanced at the mirror, to see that her wardrobe was in perfect order.

Yes, it was; and she looked lovely as ever, in her deli-

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cate rose-colored cashmere morning dress, lined and embroidered with white silk, and with her shining black hair bound back with a white ribbon.

She went down-stairs to the drawing-room, where the young Earl awaited her.

"Good-morning, Lady Cressy. I hope that you have quite recovered from the fatigue of your ball," he said, rising.

"Quite. Thanks. But pray do not call me Lady Cressy, even when we are alone. It makes me shiver to be addressed by that title, because I cannot prove my right to it," she said, as they seated themselves.

"I know not how to call you then, fair lady, for I cannot call you Miss Percie; that would be giving you a false name," replied the young Earl gravely.

"Yet it is the name that I am known by, and must continue to be known by, since I cannot prove my right to any other," answered Musa, with a sigh of despair.

"I know that you cannot," assented Lord Cressy sympathetically. "I have confidentially consulted some of the most eminent lawyers in England, and all of them agree in opinion that it would be madness to make the attempt."

Musa covered her face with her hands, and moaned. She had thought indeed that she had given up all hopes of ever being able to prove her marriage and publicly acknowledge her child. Yet when she found her own decision confirmed by Bertie's words, she felt herself plunged into deeper despair.

"Dear Musa, *dearest* Musa, I should not have wounded you with this hard legal opinion, if it had not been necessary to tell you the clear truth. But I hope, I hope I have brought balm for the wound," said Bertie very gently, as he took her hand in his.

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She looked up in his face inquiringly.

"I have crossed the ocean to give you this opinion of the London lawyers, and to point out to you the only remedy for your difficulty," he continued, gently pressing the hand that he held.

Still she looked at him with patient questioning in her large, dark, mournful eyes.

"There is one way, one sure way, and only one, Musa, by which you may confirm to yourself your rightful name and title. Musa, dearest Musa, do you understand me?" he asked, with sudden earnestness.

"No, Bertie," she answered, under her breath. And she did not want to understand him.

"Musa," he said, dropping his face upon her hand that he still grasped convulsively—"Musa, I love you; not with the brotherly love that seemed so welcome to your lonely heart. Oh, no! no! I love you as a man loves only once in his life. And I have loved you from the first moment I ever saw you."

"Bertie! I never dreamed of this!" she said, covering her eyes with her free hand.

"No," he answered, raising his head, with a deep sigh; "I kept my secret well, did I not? I loved you from the very first: from the moment that I threw myself before your infuriated horse and stopped his mad flight, and held him, rearing and plunging, while my brother, more fortunate, received you in his arms as you sprang from your carriage."

"Oh, Bertie!"

"My brother had seen and loved you before, all unknown and unsuspected by yourself. And he had been seeking you for days, and I had been aiding him in the search, when we encountered you on that critical occasion. And

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though I loved you from the first meeting of our eyes, I could not let you see my love. I could not be a traitor to my brother. That is the reason why I never came with my brother to this house. That is the reason why I remained at the hotel and devoted myself to the entertainment of our gouty tutor."

"Oh, Bertie! Did Donald ever suspect that?"

"No, never. If he had, he would have been unhappy on my account, for he loved me. Not to distress him, I concealed my love in my own bosom, and tried to smother it to death. Musa, I did not succeed."

"Oh, Bertie! I am so sorry! so very sorry!" said Musa.

"Ah! do not say so. You make me uneasy. Listen to me, Musa! dearest Musa! When you came to England last spring, and I saw you in your beauty and distress, I could scarcely forbear even then from declaring my love, and assuring you that my whole life should be devoted to the restoration of your rights, and the security of your happiness, Musa."

"You were very, very kind to me, Bertie. An angel from heaven could not have been kinder. I thought you were the very best brother that ever woman had been blessed with," said Musa gratefully.

"Ah! but it was not a mere brotherly love that I gave you then. Oh, Musa, I gave you then, as I give you now, the love that a man gives only once in his life, and gives forever."

"Oh, Bertie, my dear, I cannot marry you, because, in fact, I have made a firm resolution never to marry any one," said Musa solemnly.

"You will never keep that resolution, Musa. You ought not to keep it, and you will not keep it," he gravely and sadly replied.

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"I *ought* to keep it, and I *will* keep it. I ought *never* to marry, and I will *never* marry. Look in my face, Bertie, and see if I am not speaking sincerely," she said.

He raised his grieving eyes to hers; he saw the fixed resolution of her expression; but he saw also the dark, liquid, impassioned eyes, the glowing cheeks, the full, rich, ripe lips, and he covered his face with his hands and groaned:

"Yes, you speak sincerely, but not prophetically; for you will love, and you will marry. God help me!" he added, in a tone of despair, as he sank pale and shaking to his seat.

"Oh, Bertie, darling, do not take this so much to heart, do not," she pleaded, ready to weep for the pain she had given. "I *do* love you, Bertie, better than any man or woman in the whole world, only not in the way you wish me to do; but I love you fondly as the dearest brother a sister ever had. I would love you better if I could."

And there was silence, like death, between them. He sat so pale and motionless that Musa became uneasy, and laid her hand upon his arm, and murmured softly:

"Bertie, would it make you any happier to know, to be certain, to be perfectly assured, that I shall never marry any other man?"

"Oh, yes, yes, yes! for then I should not be rent asunder between jealousy and despair—then I should live in the hope of winning you some day to myself; for even now you say you like me more than any one else," said the young man eagerly.

"And I do like you, Bertie, or rather, I love you more than I love any one else in the world, except one little child, upon whom I have set my heart. And I will make

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you as happy as I can. Watch and listen, Bertie," she said gently, as she went to a gilded white pillar that stood in the corner of the drawing-room, and took from it a richly illuminated copy of the Holy Bible, which she brought and placed upon the little sofa table near which they had been sitting.

"Now watch and listen, Bertie," she said, as she solemnly placed her hand upon the book. "I promise and vow, on the Holy Word of the Lord, never to marry any man, unless he be yourself, Bertie."

And so saying, she reverently bowed and kissed the book. And thus by one rash act, to please a love-sick youth, she vowed away all her freedom of choice in the most sacred event of her future life.

"Thanks, oh, thanks, Musa," warmly exclaimed the young man. "I am very selfish to accept such a promise; but love, man's love, I fear, is always very selfish and exacting."

"Never mind, if I have made you happy. Are you happy now, dear Bertie?" she cheerfully inquired.

"No, not happy, but hopeful. I shall never be happy until you are my wife; but I am hopeful to be so happy," gratefully replied Bertie.

"Well, I will leave you with that hope to comfort your love until it dies," murmured Musa, with a smile.

"My love will never die; it is immortal as my soul, of which it is the life!" fervently exclaimed Bertie.

"Now I wonder," said Musa, suddenly changing the conversation, "what your father and mother would say to this suit of yours?"

"They would oppose it," frankly replied Bertie; "and I should be very sorry, but that would make no difference in my purpose. I deeply honor my father and my mother.

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Heaven forbid that I should not. But I will choose a wife for myself."

As Bertie spoke, the door was thrown open and—

"Captain Shrewsbury, to see Miss Sutton," was announced.

And the tall, dark cavalry officer entered the room bowing, while the footman closed the door and took the card up.

Musa arose and welcomed the visitor, and introduced him to Lord Cressy.

In a few moments Armida Sutton made her appearance, and greeted both the morning callers.

Lord Cressy, after exchanging a few conventional courtesies with Miss Sutton, arose to take leave.

"May I look in this evening?" he inquired, in a low voice, as he bade Musa good-morning.

"Oh, certainly. We shall all be at home, and very glad to see you," replied the lady.

And Bertie bowed over her hand and left the room. He walked rapidly and gayly down Vermont Avenue. It was a lovely spring morning, and his heart was very light. He felt so sure of winning his lady-love sooner or later.

On arriving at the hotel, he tripped lightly up to his rooms, meeting his valet on the landing.

"Any letters left for me, Brooks?" he gayly inquired.

"Yes, my lord; they are on the table in the parlor. Shall I fetch them, my lord?" obsequiously inquired the man.

"No, I am going there. That will do," replied the master, as he passed into his room.

Several letters lay on the table. Among them was one that instantly attracted the attention of the young Earl. It was a rather large packet, in a white envelope, with a

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deep black border and a broad black seal. It was directed to—

"*The Earl of Cressy.*"

With a strange sinking of the heart, he seized the letter and tore off the envelope.

Within it was a second envelope, also having a deep black border. This was unsealed, and was directed to—

"HIS GRACE, THE DUKE OF MONTCALLA."

Bertie reeled and sank, overcome by the shock, into the nearest chair. He know as well as if he had read the black-bordered letter, the fatal news it contained. His father had passed away!

For some moments he was quite incapable of reading the mournful news. The words mingled together, the lines swam before his vision.

The letter concluded by saying that the remains of the deceased would be embalmed and laid in state, and that the funeral would be delayed until the arrival of the young Duke.

The next morning the young Duke took an affectionate leave of Musa, and at once started on his homeward journey.

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CHAPTER XIV.

A WEDDING—MUSA'S ENEMIES.

THE day after the young Duke's departure, Musa received a letter directed to her in Mr. Locke's handwriting. She opened it, and found within it another letter bearing the New York postmark, and directed to "Mrs. White." It contained only the usual semi-weekly report of little Musette's health, sent her by Mrs. Seaforth.

She was rejoiced to hear that her child was still in fine health, and improving in strength and beauty every day. And that her young protégé, Sam Seaforth, as he was called, took ardently to his studies.

Having satisfied herself on these points, she folded her letter up, with a smile of delight, and opened her bureau drawer and took from it the ebony casket in which she kept her most cherished papers.

Then she suddenly thought of the last letter that she had received before this one—the letter that had summoned her to the sick-bed of her child. And she wondered whether, in her terror and confusion that day, she had remembered to put away that letter. She opened her casket once more, and examined its contents. But the letter she sought was not among them. Then she searched her drawers, but without success. At length she grew seriously uneasy, and rang for her maid.

"Servia," she said, as the girl made her appearance, "after I left here to go to New York that night two weeks

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ago, did I leave a letter in a black-edged envelope lying anywhere about here?"

"No, Miss," readily replied the girl. "You put it away. I seen you do it."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, indeed, Miss, certain sure. I seen you do it."

"Then I must have overlooked it," said Musa, opening her casket once more.

"'Twa'n't in there as you put it, Miss. I tell you where you put it. You put it in this drawer. I seen you do it," said the girl, pointing to the second drawer from the top of the bureau.

Musa hastily unlocked this drawer, and drew it out.

"You put it in this here left-hand front corner, underneaf of this here ivory glove box," said the girl, laying her finger on the receptacle in question.

"Oh, so I did; I remember now perfectly well that I did. But I fear I never should have remembered it, if I had not been reminded by you," said Musa, with a smile of relief, as she lifted the glove box and sought for the missing letter.

Of course it was not there, for Armida Sutton had stolen it, and now kept possession of it as a means of future power over Musa.

"I cannot find it," said Musa, after a thorough search through the drawer. "Are you quite sure I put it here, Servia?"

"High! Yes, Miss Musa, I seen you do it wid my own two lookin' eyes," replied the astonished girl.

"Of course you did. I need not have asked you, for I remember perfectly well that I did put it there; and yet I cannot find it. It certainly is not here now."

Musa searched the drawer anxiously. She finally gave

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up the search, but she could not so readily dismiss the subject from her mind.

"What had become of the missing letter?" she asked herself, over and over again.

Had it fallen into the hands of any one who had given it a private circulation among her rivals, her enemies, her enviers, haters, and maligners? Was it through that lost letter the White Domino had received his clue to affront her?

She could not tell.

The White Domino! Who was he? She did not know. She had had no opportunity of ascertaining. Now, however, she determined, if possible, to satisfy herself. She hastily locked up her bureau, put the keys in her pocket, and descended to the drawing-room. There she found all the ladies of the household gathered.

She sat down among them, and at once entered upon the question that occupied her mind.

"Mrs. Shrewsbury, you noticed the White Domino who came up and saluted me as Mrs. White, just before supper?" she inquired.

"Oh, yes; the White Domino who called you *Mrs.* White! clearly mistaking you for some one else, the idiot! Yes, I noticed him," replied the old lady.

"Did you know who he was?"

"No, indeed."

"But did he not unmask at the supper?"

"Why, my dear child, there were as many as fifty of those White Dominoes. People who are unable or unwilling to go to the expense of fancy dresses, or the trouble of supporting characters, put on long white cotton gowns, with white hoods and masks, and call themselves White Dominoes. It would have been impossible to have

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identified your idiot among them," said Mrs. Shrewsbury.

Musa acknowledged the difficulty, but she was not satisfied.

The next important event on Vermont Avenue was the marriage of Clarice Shrewsbury with Captain Horace Howard.

The wedding-day was fixed for the first of June.

Musa behaved with her usual munificent generosity. She presented her favorite Clarice with a complete and elegant wedding outfit, a beautiful set of opal jewelry, and a silver tea service.

And she ordered a grand wedding breakfast, and invited a select party of wedding guests.

On the morning of the first of June, the house on Vermont Avenue was converted into a beautiful floral palace, so lavish was the display of flowers in every room and hall.

In her own room, Musa, dressed to attend the wedding party to the altar, stood, with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, opening and reading one after another a pile of little notes.

These were cold, short refusals of her invitations to the wedding breakfast.

Each curt note was a "cut," and *intended* to be a cut, and as such Musa understood and received it.

What was the reason? she asked herself again. Had the missing letter from Willow Cottage, containing her fatal secret, fallen into the hands of an enemy, who had circulated it?

Most likely. But who was that enemy? She could not even guess.

While she was still engaged in reading these unkind

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refusals, that did not even pretend to be excuses, her maid Servia entered the room, and announced that the carriages were at the door, and the bride and her attendants were waiting for her.

Musa laid aside the notes that still remained unread, and went down to the front hall, where the bridal train stood. All being now ready, they entered the carriages.

The wedding ceremony went off with great *éclat*.

The whole company returned to the house on Vermont Avenue, where the beautifully decorated rooms and the sumptuous wedding breakfast awaited them.

But not half the invited guests had responded to the invitation. And of those who did come, about two-thirds were gentlemen.

No words can describe how humiliating this was to Musa. *She* understood the cruel slight that had been offered her. So also did her secret enemy, Armida Sutton, who was the unsuspected cause of it. But to Mrs. Shrewsbury and Mrs. Carew, and to the bride herself, it was a profound mystery.

But if the company was deficient in numbers, it certainly was not in quality. The ladies and gentlemen present were those of the very highest rank, and of the class who are, or ought to be, sufficiently removed from malign and vulgar gossip to be out of the reach of its influence.

The usual compliments were paid, the usual speeches made, and the usual healths drank. The breakfast occupied an hour, at the end of which the bride "evaporated" from the room, and went to change her bridal dress for a travelling suit of silver-gray poplin.

And in another hour the newly-married pair took leave of their friends, and, followed by the warm good wishes of all, they entered the carriage to drive down to the Seventh

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street pier, where they took the steamer *Flash* for the lower Potomac and Chesapeake Bay, intending to spend their honeymoon at "The Shoals," the ancestral home of the bridegroom.

The guests lingered some little time after the departure of the bride and bridegroom, and then took leave, with complimentary expressions of the pleasure they enjoyed.

The more intimate friends of the family, however, remained to dinner.

Among those were Commodore Howard, Captain Shrewsbury, Colonel Carew, and Mr. Lyttleton Locke.

Before dinner Colonel Carew came and seated himself next his beautiful hostess, and said:

"Look here, my love! Don't you think it about time that you should pay a visit down to our neighborhood, if it is only to look at your own lovely place, 'Bay Beauty'? 'Sleeping Beauty' it has been these twenty years or more. Now don't you think it is about time you should come down and wake it up?"

"Yes," answered Musa. "My guardian here has been telling me that it is absolutely necessary that I should go down there for a few weeks this summer. And I shall go."

"That is right. Mrs. Shrewsbury and Miss Sutton have promised to come and lighten the dullness of Pirate's Peak this summer, as they did last. Captain and Mrs. Horace Howard, our young couple, will be at 'The Shoals.' And with you at 'Bay Beauty,' our neighborhood will be a heaven on earth," said the gallant Colonel.

It was arranged that Musa should visit "Bay Beauty" the first week in July.

As the first of July drew near, Musa made preparations

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for her visit to her country seat, "Bay Beauty," on the Chesapeake.

Making an excuse of getting out of the way while her servants were packing trunks and boxes, and putting away house and table linen, and so forth, under Mrs. Shrewsbury's directions, Musa slipped away to New York for a few days, and went to Willow Cottage to see her child.

She found little Musette, now a fine baby of seven months old, well grown and in good health, but having the same sad, wistful look, "meekly loving," in her deep dark eyes.

Though Musa's first object in coming to New York was to see her child, she had a second object that was even more important.

Since the secret of Willow Cottage seemed to have become suspected by some unknown party in Washington, as was proved by the mysterious words of the "White Domino" at her fancy ball, Musa saw the expediency of removing the child and its attendants not only from the house, but from the neighborhood.

On the morning after her arrival, she broke the subject to Mrs. Seaforth, telling that simple-minded woman that she thought Harlem would be unhealthy, from the prevalence of malaria during the summer and autumn months, and proposing to her, for a handsome compensation, to move into some more salubrious neighborhood.

Mrs. Seaforth, who was very kind-hearted and obliging, as well as very anxious to provide for her future, by "making hay while the sun shone," readily consented to everything that her rich patroness proposed.

Musa spent the whole of the next week in hunting for a suitable house in a healthy location.

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At length she found a little country place at Inwood, on the east bank of the Hudson, a few miles from the city.

It was a pretty brown cottage, on high ground facing the river, in a garden rich in flowers and fruit, and surrounded by woods.

The place was for sale, and Musa bought it, and furnished it from basement to garret.

To say the little household were delighted with their new home, would but faintly describe their rapture. They were in ecstasies with all around them.

As soon as Musa had settled them at the Brown Cottage, she prepared for her own return to Washington.

She now felt sure that she could trust her child to the united care of Mrs. Seaforth, who had proved herself so perfectly faithful and conscientious, and Mary Morris, who had grown to love her nursling with all a mother's passionate devotion. And so she resolved to take old Cassy back with her to Washington.

It was near the first of July when Musa bade a tearful adieu to her little family at Inwood.

On the evening of the same day she reached home.

The family at the house on Vermont Avenue were all pleased to see old Cassy back again, in attendance on her mistress.

Musa explained the return of the old woman by saying, that having no further use for her lodgings in New York, she had given them up and brought their keeper home.

"No further use for her lodgings in New York!" said Armida Sutton to herself. "I wonder if her child is dead, poor little forsaken and neglected creature."

Musa found all the preparations completed for her departure from Washington.

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It was on the first day of July, a beautiful morning, cool for the season, that Musa, attended by her faithful old Cassy, and accompanied by her small party of friends, embarked on board the steamer *Busy Bee*, for the Lower Potomac and Chesapeake Bay, *en route* for her old ancestral home, "Bay Beauty"—THERE TO MEET HER FATE!

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CHAPTER XV.

BAY BEAUTY—FATAL LOVE.

"THAT'S Bay Beauty! That's your home, Miss Percie."

The speaker was a tall, gaunt, dark-skinned, sun-burned man, of about sixty-five years of age, with grizzly gray hair and beard, and dressed in a pea-jacket, duck trowsers and tarpaulin hat.

He was Captain Clyde, of the little coasting steamer *Flash o' Lightning*, and had been in service on the bay and its tributary rivers, boy or man, for more than half a century. And he was perfectly familiar, not only with every rock and island, every cape and headland, and every inlet and rivulet, but with the whole family history of every proprietor along the coast.

It was a glorious afternoon, on the second of July, and the descending sun was flooding all the sky and sea with golden light, as the steamer glided onward.

Captain Clyde stood in the bows of the boat, among a group of passengers, with whom was Musa and her party of friends.

He held a telescope in his hands, pointed to a bright little inlet, still some miles distant, that made up from the open bay into the western shore of the Chesapeake.

Its features were not distinctly visible, however, to the unassisted eye.

"That Bay Beauty? Oh, I did not know that we were

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so near. Will you let me look ?" eagerly inquired Musa, holding out her hand for the glass.

"Certainly," said Captain Clyde. And he put the telescope in her hand, focussed it to her sight, and poised it in position.

A scene of matchless beauty lay before her.

A bright little inlet of about half a mile in width and two miles in length, made up from the bay into the land, between gently undulating and lightly wooded hills, now clothed in the brilliant green of summer.

About half-way up the inlet, and midway between the verdant shores, lay a little green islet, with a girdle of rose bushes in full bloom around its banks. In the midst of the islet stood an elegant white freestone temple or pavilion, erected in an octagonal form, with its white roof supported by white pillars, around which were twined thickly climbing rose vines in full bloom. It was called the Isle of Roses.

At the head of the inlet, on the highest ground, stood an elegant villa of white freestone, having long piazzas running the whole length of the front, and from foundation to roof, supported by ten white marble pillars. Behind and on each side this white palace, sending it out in bold relief, stood tall, bright green woods.

Over all the setting sun poured a flood of golden glory.

As the steamer drew near "Cape Welcome," Musa, who was gazing on the scene with the deepest interest, discovered a group of gayly-dressed persons on the little pier.

When nearer still, she recognized the individuals forming it. There were Colonel, Mrs. and Miss Carew, Commodore Howard, and the newly-married lovers, Captain Horace and Clarice Howard.

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They were all waving white handkerchiefs, and cheering like frenzy.

As the steamer came alongside, they all ran down to the edge of the pier to receive the travellers.

When the company reached the house, Clarice, who had been exercising a friendly oversight of the preparations, said: "Come, Musa. I will show you to your rooms," as she led the way into the broad hall and up the broad stairs to the upper floor.

There was another broad hall, running from front to back, with doors at each end opening into the upper piazzas, and six doors on either side opening into spacious bed-chambers.

"Here, Musa, this right-hand front room I reserved for you. And the left-hand room, opposite to yours, I have taken the 'unwarrantable' liberty of reserving for myself, in case I should ever want to come and stay all night with you."

"You were quite right, my little love," replied Musa, kissing her.

Clarice opened the door of the right-hand front, saying:

"I have christened this the 'Rose Room,' from its fittings."

And as they entered the room Musa smiled with pleasure at the beauty of its decorations and the fitness of its name.

The "Rose Room" was a spacious chamber, with two tall windows looking down the bay. It had a rose-colored velvet carpet on the floor; rose-colored rep satin chair and sofa covers; lace curtains at the windows, lined with rose-colored silk; a rose-colored musquito net draped the bedstead; and lastly a rose-colored velvet pincushion and a rose-colored toilet set stood upon the dressing bureau.

"This is certainly the Rose Room. A baby or a bird

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would know that much, at a glance," said Musa, with a smile.

"So glad you like it. But I cannot take credit for it. The French upholsterer Father Locke sent down fitted up the rooms. All I did here was to name them, and put in a few finishing touches. I will leave you now, dear, and go to mamma. She has good reason to be jealous, for I have been so much more with you than with her since we all met."

Cassy speedily unstrapped the trunks and took out the trays containing her mistress' light summer dresses.

"Lay out the maize-colored berege, Cassy, and the Irish point berthe and sleeve frills," said Musa.

"And what jewels, honey?"

"Opals," said the young lady.

Half an hour afterward Musa surveyed herself from head to foot in the old-fashioned six-foot mirror that stood on castors near her dressing bureau.

She was satisfied with the reflection.

She had often been much more richly arrayed, but was never more becomingly dressed than in this simple evening costume. The soft maize-colored berege dress was perfectly suited to her rich dark complexion. It was made very low on the neck and short in the sleeves. An Irish point lace berthe delicately veiled her beautiful bust, and ruffles of the same sheer lace fell from the short sleeves. An opal necklace glowed softly on her bosom, opal bracelets spanned her wrists, and an opal brooch with pendants clasped her bodice. In the dark clustering curls of her hair a rich aromatic tea-rose bloomed.

So she went down-stairs unconsciously to meet her fate.

As she walked into the drawing-room she observed that it was empty, and she had leisure to notice the pleasant

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summer fitting up of the apartment—its large windows simply draped with India muslin, its floor covered with an India matting, and furnished with light cane chairs and sofas, and marble-topped tables and stands, decorated with vases of flowers. Through the windows that opened upon the piazza she saw a group of her friends apparently enjoying the coolness of the twilight hour and the sea-breeze.

The Shrewsburys, the Carews and the Howards were all there. But there was some one else, a gentleman whom Musa noticed at once, because he was a perfect stranger to her. And after once noticing him, her attention became fixed upon him. This was certainly a very remarkable looking man, who would at once have attracted attention in any crowd, or under any circumstances.

He was endowed with wonderful personal beauty and grandeur of form. He was very tall, broad-shouldered, erect and stately, yet so well proportioned as to be perfectly graceful. His hands and feet were small and elegant in shape. His head was finely set upon his shoulders, and covered with fine lightly curling golden brown hair, that waved around a high broad forehead, royal in its intellectual beauty. His eyebrows were dark and finely drawn, and his eyes were large, dark, rather prominent, and very brilliant, but whether they were blue or gray was doubtful. His features were of the noble Grecian type, and his complexion was very fair. A long and full golden brown beard completed the manly beauty of his perfect face. He was dressed in a full suit of pearl gray cassimere, and carried a soft hat of the same color in his hand.

Musa, from her covert, gazed on this beautiful and majestic figure, this masterpiece of nature, with the same freedom of admiration with which she would have contem-

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plated a fine statue or picture, or any other masterpiece of art.

But never had she seen picture, or statue, or living form so handsome and so stately as this upon which she now looked.

Her artist soul was fascinated and delighted by the mere material beauty and grandeur. She gazed and continued to gaze, until Clarice Howard, the little bride, turning suddenly, discovered her presence, and called out cheerily:

"Oh, here is our lady hostess! Come in, Miss Percie is waiting for us. Come!"

And she entered, followed by all the company.

Kate Carew, attended by the handsome stranger, came straight up to Musa, and said:

"Miss Percie, permit me to present to you my son, Mr. August Carew."

The stranger bowed deeply, and in lifting his head fixed his gaze full upon the lovely face of Musa.

Then their eyes met for the first time, and hers fell beneath his look of involuntary ardent admiration. Her cheeks suddenly flushed as she spoke words of welcome:

"I am very glad to see you here, Mr. Carew. Your mother is one of my dearest friends," she said, as she gave him her hand.

He took it, and bowed over it.

"Thanks, Miss Percie, for your kind invitation, received through my mother, and for your still kinder welcome," he answered, in a voice so deep, full and melodious that its tones lingered in her ear like notes of music.

Before Musa could speak again, a servant appeared at the door and announced dinner.

"Commodore Howard, will you give Mrs. Shrewsbury

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your arm to the table?" said Musa, to the oldest and largest of her guests.

The elephantine and gallant Commodore made a clumsy bow, and immediately took Mrs. Chief-Justice under his wing and led the way to the dining-room.

Colonel Carew escorted his bewitching cousin Kate, which led Espirita to say that "if her mamma were not the most confiding of ladies, there might be a domestic tragedy, followed by a sensational trial."

"Will you honor me, Miss Percie?" murmured the deep, melodious voice of the stranger.

Musa bowed in silence, and took the offered arm with a tremor as new to her experience as it was provoking to her pride.

When they reached the dining-room and took their places at the table, August Carew seated himself beside Musa.

Opposite to them sat Colonel Carew and "Cousin Kate."

A large chandelier hanging over the table illumined the scene.

Musa had scarcely settled herself in her seat, when she was struck with surprise at the strange demeanor of Colonel Carew.

The Old Harry was staring directly across the table, at the face and form of August Carew; his countenance was aghast, and his fiery red hair and beard were fairly on end with astonishment.

Fortunately the other guests were all too much occupied with seating and settling themselves at the table to notice Old Harry's consternation. Besides Musa, no one detected him except his companion, Kate Carew, who softly laid her hand upon his arm, and gently inquired:

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"What is the matter, Cousin Harold? Don't you know that you will soon draw attention by staring at your opposite neighbors so fixedly?"

"That's so," assented Old Harry, with a deep sigh, as he recovered himself and turned away his eyes. "But it is the most amazing thing I ever saw in all the days of my life—*that* it is!"

"What is, Cousin Harold?" softly inquired Kate Carew.

"*That* is—the likeness, you know. Why, your son there, Mr. August Carew, he is the very image, the very counterpart, the—the—the very *fac-simile* of what Reginald Percie was when he was a young gentleman down here, and considered the handsomest man in the State——"

"Except *yourself*, Cousin Harold. Come now, *you* were the handsomest man of your time. I have heard the old people say so a thousand times or more. And I can well believe them when I look at you now," archly replied Kate.

Now, if Old Harry had an amiable weakness it was vanity.

"Umph, umph, umph! You flatter me, sweet cousin," he replied, as he caressed the bristling little blazes of his fiery red beard. "But I tell you the fact is overwhelming. The gentleman opposite seems a reappearance of Reginald Percie himself, as he appeared the summer he married Musadora Fairfax."

"Cousin Harold, here is the footman standing patiently with a plate of soup by your side, and *mine* is growing cold," said Kate Carew, who was getting tired of the subject.

"I beg ten thousand pardons!" exclaimed Colonel Carew, as he permitted the footman to set his soup before

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him—"ten thousand pardons, my lovely cousin; but—but—that likeness is perfectly stunning."

While Old Harry's thoughts were thus engaged with his opposite neighbor, that neighbor was devoting himself to his beautiful companion.

The conversation was interrupted by the removal of the cloth and the placing of the dessert on the table.

And then, over the fruit and light wines, the conversation became so general that August Carew had no opportunity of a further *tête-à-tête* with Musa.

In due time, Mrs. Shrewsbury gave the signal for retiring, and the ladies all arose and withdrew to the drawing-room, leaving the gentlemen to their wine.

Old Harry, left without his "sweet remembrancer," took to staring worse than ever across the table, at August Carew.

That gentleman was at first amused and then became somewhat embarrassed under those fixed regards, and to break the spell he leaned across the board and pleasantly inquired:

"Shall I have a glass of wine with you, Colonel?"

"With pleasure, Reginald, my boy," replied the Colonel. And then he looked aghast and exclaimed, "THERE! Thunder! I have done it! I knew I should! Pardon me, Mr.—Mr.—Colonel—Mr.——"

"My name is Carew," smilingly replied that gentleman, who began to suspect that his opposite neighbor had perhaps already had as much wine as was good for him, and to regret his invitation to him to take more.

"Oh! ah! yes, Carew, certainly!" exclaimed Old Harry, recovering himself with an effort. "You must excuse me, if you please, Mr. Carew. But I really owe you an apology and an explanation, which I will proceed to give you. My

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old friend there, Commodore Howard, can bear me out in my statements."

The huge Commodore bowed, though he had not the remotest idea what was coming.

Mr. Carew looked politely attentive, and a little amused. He was not yet sure that his new friend was quite himself.

"Mr. Carew, the earliest friend of my boyhood and the dearest friend of my manhood was Reginald Percie, the late proprietor of this beautiful place. Sir, you are the very counterpart of what Reginald Percie was in his young manhood—form, figure, height, size, proportion, hair, beard, eyes—all! Why, the very smile with which you listen to me was Reginald Percie's smile before it was yours. And your eyes, sir—pardon me, we are all together here snug, the ladies are gone, and I may say it—*the Percie eyes*, the love-compelling eyes of the Percies, that no woman's heart could resist, you have them, sir. Reginald Percie was the handsomest man of his day, sir, and you are his perfect image!"

This was extremely embarrassing, to say the least of it, to any modest man. And so Mr. Carew signed to the butler, who brought him a bottle of Haut Sauterne—a very sobering wine, it is said, for those who have had too much port and sherry. He bade the man fill his glass, and take the bottle around to Colonel Carew.

"Thanks, Reg—I mean Mr. Carew," said the Colonel, as he filled his own glass—"thanks. Your health."

And both gentlemen bowed as they raised their glasses to their lips.

"I was saying, Mr. Carew, that the sight of you, a perfect fac-simile of Reginald Percie, sends me back a quarter of a century. As I gazed at you, sir—and I could not help gazing—I fell into a sort of dream or reverie, and grew

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unconscious of the rudeness of gazing, until you spoke to me. Was it strange that, coming out of my dream at the sound of your voice, I should have been a little astray, and addressed you by the name that was uppermost in my thoughts?"

"By no means," politely acquiesced Mr. Carew.

"Why, sir, if I had not known the history of Reginald Percie's married life, and known that he left but one child, a daughter, our beautiful young hostess here, by my word, sir, I should have taken you to be his son. It looks so natural and right to see you in this house, sir. And, by the way, if you should be so happy as to woo and win the lovely heiress of this estate, and come to be master here, upon my life, sir, you would be the right man in the right place. And as for Miss Percie——"

"Excuse me, Colonel; had we not better leave ladies' names out of our conversation over the wine? And, by the way, is it not time to join them?" politely inquired Mr. Carew.

"Certainly, certainly; let us go to the ladies. I wish to have a word with my cousin Kate before I say good-night," assented the gallant Colonel, as he set the example by rising from the table.

They went into the drawing-room, but found it empty.

Musa and her guests had passed out through the French windows, and were again assembled on the front piazza, enjoying the beauty of the night and the coolness of the sea-breeze.

The full harvest-moon, now half way up between the eastern horizon and the zenith, hung in the deep blue heavens like a globe of "one entire and perfect chrysalis," shining down upon the bay and lighting it up like a sea of fluid silver. Nearer, their own Isle of Roses with its vine-

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wreathed white pavilion, half way between the mansion-house and the mouth of the little inlet, lay like a fairy isle and palace, while the flowery banks of the inlet sent forth upon the air odors as fragrant and aromatic as the gardens of Araby the Blest.

"Welcome, gentlemen," said Musa, turning graciously to receive her guests, from whom a simultaneous low murmur of delight at the beauty of the moon-lit sea and isle was heard.

"Bay Beauty! Yes, it is a paradisiacal scene!" murmured August Carew, as he gazed with something like veneration in his full, dark eyes upon the beauty and the glory of the heavens and the earth.

"We thought we would take our coffee out here," said the practical Clarice; "so, if you like, Musa, my dear, as the gentlemen have joined us at last, I will ring for it."

"Do so, if you please. You should be hostess, my love, on this first evening of our arrival," said Musa, smiling.

"I *am* hostess. Was I not here to welcome you all?" laughingly demanded Clarice, as she stepped through the French window into the drawing-room, to ring the bell.

In a few moments coffee, tea and chocolate were brought out on a large silver waiter, and served to the visitors.

And all chatted gayly, and some a little recklessly, as they held the delicate shell-like cups in their hands, and sipped at intervals of their contents.

When the empty cups were returned upon the waiter, and the service was removed, Clarice said it was time for her to go home.

"But I thought you would occupy the Lily Room that you have reserved for yourself, my darling. Will you not do so, to please me?" inquired Musa, in a low tone of regret and entreaty.

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"No, not to-night, dearest Musa," murmured Clarice in reply. "You must know that I am housekeeper at 'The Shoals.' There is really no lady there but myself. And to-morrow is the third of July, and we have to prepare for a large company on the Fourth. I have invited all your friends, Musa, and of course you will come. I shall cry all day if you don't."

"Of course, my darling, I shall go; that is, if my guests do. My action must be ruled by theirs, you are aware," said Musa.

"I suppose so," Clarice reluctantly agreed.

The next day was one of the most glorious that ever dawned upon the earth and sea.

Bay Beauty seemed a perfect Eden of delight.

The pleasant family breakfast parlor was the large front room on the right-hand side of the wide middle entrance hall.

Through its open windows came the fresh sea-breeze, laden with perfume from the Isle of Roses and from the banks of flowers that bordered the Inlet.

A merry party was gathered around the breakfast-table, consisting of Mrs. Shrewsbury, Mrs. Kate Carew, Armida Sutton, Musa and August Carew.

They were all, even including Mrs. Chief-Justice, in the gayest spirits, as they discussed their plans for the day and the morrow.

Musa was much in the company of August Carew throughout the day, and was charmed with the delicacy, refinement and nobility of character which he exhibited in all the phases of social intercourse. She discovered that the beauty of his mind equalled the attractiveness of his person, and that his nature was spontaneously responsive to whatever was beneficent and noble.

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The next day, when all the company went to spend the Fourth of July at "The Shoals," Musa became still better acquainted with August, and her respect for him continually deepened, and her admiration of him rapidly increased. He was constantly at her side, notwithstanding his mother's efforts to keep him and Musa from enjoying *tête-à-têtes*. Kate Carew had set her heart on having Musa marry the young Duke of Montcalla, who constantly wrote affectionate and hopeful letters to his American idol; hence, she was determined that Musa and August should have no opportunities for love-making. But the young people unconsciously foiled all her attempts to keep them apart, and after their return to Bay Beauty their intimacy grew apace. As time went on, August became so devoted to Musa that his mother began to feel as though she were struggling against inevitable fate.

And Musa?

With all the strength and passion of her strong and passionate soul Musa loved August Carew. She loved him as she had never dreamed that it was in her power to love. The mild affection that she had borne toward her late husband, the calm friendship she felt for Bertie, was as the winter moonshine to the summer sunlight compared to the passionate devotion with which her soul worshipped her idol.

She recalled now poor Bertie's prophetic words, in answer to her rejection of him, on the ground of her self-imposed vows of celibacy:

"You will love, and you will marry; not me, but some happier and more favored man," he had said.

And to quiet his jealous foreboding, she had sworn to him never to marry unless she should marry *him!*

A part of Bertie's prophecy had already come true—she

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loved! She loved with an all-absorbing passion that should have made, under other circumstances, the happiness of her whole life.

But, under present conditions, what could this worshipping love bring to her but infinite woe?

She was enchained in the fetters of an unparalleled destiny.

She had been a wife, who could not prove her marriage. She was now a widow, who durst not breathe a hint of her widowhood; and oh! bitterest fate of all, she was a mother who dared not acknowledge her own child!

And in view of this destiny, so exceptional in its secret sorrow, bitterness and desolation, she had consecrated herself to a life of celibacy.

She had answered every declaration of love with the assurance that she should never marry.

She had, indeed, approached nearer to an engagement with Bertie than with any one else; for to calm his jealous previsions, she had promised and even vowed never to marry any one, unless she married him—assuring him, however, at the same time, that she should not even marry him.

Yes, she was in the grasp of an inexorable fate.

She felt that she could not, in honor or safety, accept the hand of August Carew, if he should propose to her; and yet she felt that to reject and lose him, would be to her worse than death, or any other doom.

And oh, if ever, in the full enjoyment of her lover's society, she forgot for a little while the chains that bound her life, she was sure to be soon reminded of them by the mail parcels forwarded two or three times a week by Mr. Locke.

There were most cordial and affectionate letters from Bertie, from which it was evident that, however *she* might

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consider the pledge she had given him, *he* looked upon it as a betrothal!

She knew not how to answer these confident letters.

She could not dash his hopes by reiterating her declaration that she should never marry any one; for, ah! in her secret heart she was already casting about for ways and means of escape from the terrible bondage of circumstances, so that she might be free to marry August Carew.

Nor were these letters from England the only reminders she received.

There were letters from Inwood, New York, giving her news of her child, telling her of the growing health, beauty and intelligence of the little creature, and of the devoted love borne her by her foster-nurse, Mary Morris.

"I don't know what that poor woman will do when you take that child away from her. Indeed, I think it will go near to break her heart," wrote Mrs. Seaforth in the last letter that Musa had received from her.

"When I take her away! Ah, when I take her away! When will that be? My little child! Oh, my meek-eyed little darling! When shall I take you to my bosom, where it is your right to be?" sighed Musa, with an almost breaking heart, as she felt again the chafing of the fetters that bound her life.

Meanwhile the summer passed and autumn set in.

Musa dreaded the close of the season at Bay Beauty, which must separate her from him whose presence had become necessary not only to her happiness, but, as it seemed, to her very life.

But inexorable time marched on. September waned to its close. And October, with its glorious skies, its gorgeous foliage, its frosty mornings and chilly evenings, was upon them.

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It was still very pleasant at Bay Beauty, and though they could no longer sit out on the piazza to enjoy the sea view until a late hour of the night, yet the bright wood fires in the open fire-places lent a new charm and attraction to the house.

So Musa, loth to lose her idol, lingered through October.

But when November came, with its gray skies and brown woods, and its rain and wind, she reluctantly consented to make preparations to return to town.

But before these preparations were concluded, a great joy came to Musa.

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CHAPTER XVI.

AN EVENING BEFORE THE FLITTING.

It was early on a clear, cold, still, starlit night, in the first week of November. It was the evening before the departure of Musa and her guests from Bay Beauty, and nearly all the preparations had been completed for the flitting.

Mrs. Shrewsbury and Captain Philip, her son, had taken leave of Clarice and her friends at "The Shoals" that morning. And they were now shut up alone together in the old lady's private sitting-room, talking over the arrangements for the approaching marriage of that gallant cavalry officer and the sprightly little heiress of Pirate's Peak, Espirita Carew.

Kate Carew was in her bed-chamber, engaged in some final little preparation for her journey.

Armida Sutton, in her own apartment, was similarly occupied.

There was a bright, cheerful wood fire burning in the open fire-place, in the old-fashioned, oak-panelled parlor.

But there were only two occupants of the room—August Carew and Musa Percie.

They were seated far apart, at opposite sides of a large round table that stood in the middle of the room before the fire.

Both were reading, or trying to read, and both were silent and fearfully self-conscious of being under a spell.

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August was the first to lay down his book and speak.

He looked at Musa in silence for a few minutes.

And she felt that he was looking at her, though she never raised her eyes.

"Miss Percie," he began, in a low voice, "this is our last evening on this beautiful coast. The night is very fine, for November, and the sea is grand under the starlight. Will you put on your shawl, and give me your company for a walk on the beach?"

"I shall be very much pleased to do so," answered Musa, as she arose to leave the room to get her wraps.

While she was gone, August Carew left his seat by the fire and began to walk up and down the floor.

In about five minutes, however, she rejoined him.

They went out together, and took the Almond Tree Avenue down to Cape Welcome.

The tender exotic trees that bordered this avenue, and gave it their name, were now quite stripped of their leaves; and the clear blue-black night sky with its millions of brilliant stars could be seen through their naked twigs and branches.

The pair walked down the avenue in almost perfect silence.

And not until they came out upon the open beach and saw the clear dark bay, with its glittering ripples, almost rivalling the clear dark sky with its sparkling stars, stretched out before them, was a single sentence spoken.

Then August Carew broke the silence, as he had broken it a few minutes before, in the drawing-room.

"This is our last evening at Bay Beauty, Miss Percie," he said, in a very sad tone.

"And I am very sorry," murmured Musa.

"To-morrow morning we part and go on our several ways

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and in opposite directions. You and the ladies of your party to Washington, and my mother and myself to Richmond," he added, gravely.

"I am very sorry," repeated Musa, in a low voice.

The answer was a monotonous and a conventional one, but not the less sincere on that account.

"And now before we part, Miss Percie, I must thank you for the happiest season I have ever passed in all my life," he added, in an earnest manner.

"You are very good to say so. And certainly I may return your words. We have to thank *you*, Mr. Carew, for much enjoyment this summer and autumn. Your presence here has added very much to our pleasures," answered Musa, compelling herself to speak with conventional formality and politeness, although her heart was beating fast and her voice was trembling.

Perceiving her emotion, and drawing a favorable augury from it, he spoke again and more earnestly:

"Musa, will you make me happy for all our future lives? I love you. I dare to hope and believe you love me. Will you be my wife?"

The words were spoken. But oh! so calmly, though so earnestly. And he was looking in her face, pouring the light and love of his soul into her eyes while he waited her answer.

But her heart was throbbing so violently, that she could not speak for some moments.

He waited patiently, walking slowly by her side, and holding with his right hand *her* hand that lay upon his left arm, for a few moments, and then he asked:

"How shall I interpret your silence, dearest Musa?"

"Yes," she murmured very slowly and softly; "yes, I will be you wife, for I love you, August."

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Forgotten for the moment was her solemn oath to Bertie! Forgotten even the terrible secrets of her life! Forgotten was her very child, as she gave this promise!

He drew her to his bosom, and sealed their betrothal on her lips, murmuring:

"And I promise to devote my whole life to the welfare and happiness of my beloved wife. It was to ask you this question, dearest Musa, that I brought you out here, under the stars," he added, as they walked on.

They walked and talked for more than an hour longer, but their further conversation would be interesting to no one except themselves.

At length they turned to go home.

As soon as they re-entered the house, Musa hurried up to her own room, where she locked the door, and threw herself upon her bed, suffering all the horrors of the reaction and the realization of her position.

"What have I done? Oh, great Heaven! what have I done?" she muttered, with a shudder, as she buried her face on the pillow, and thought of her sacred promise to Bertie, who had given her the honest love of his young heart, and thought of her little, meek-eyed child, left among strangers, unacknowledged, and now never to be acknowledged.

For she could not force herself to tell the unhappy secret of her private marriage and maternity to the devoted lover, who was about to become her second husband.

Yes, he was certainly to be her second husband. For her mad love for him was the strongest passion of her life, and she was fully resolved to be his wife, in defiance of any ruin or misery that might afterward ensue from the marriage.

She had come to this—to marry August Carew, whatever might be the consequences to herself or to others.

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There was no indecision in her mind now. Her resolution was unchangeable as fate.

She would marry him because all other evils in life, and death itself, seemed light in comparison to the anguish and despair she would suffer in leaving or losing him.

There was some satisfaction in having come to this fixed determination.

But in the meantime she was stung and tortured by pity and remorse, and haunted by the image of the faithful friend she was about to betray, and of the meek-eyed, lovely child she was about to discard.

But in all this she did not suffer as much as she felt she should suffer in the loss of him she loved unto death.

She tried to compromise with her conscience in this manner. She resolved first to write to Bertie, and request him to release her from her rash vow. It would be a mere form, she knew, for however it might pain the young Duke to comply with her request, honor, generosity and manliness would compel him to do it.

But her child—her little, meek, loving baby! Oh, with what anguish she thought of her! Once it occurred to Musa that she could take the little, lovely, dark-eyed darling, and lay her in her lover's arms, and tell him the story of her life, and trust his noble heart to receive her with sympathy and affection.

Ah, if she had only followed that inspiration of her good angel, and trusted the great soul who had given her his whole love and faith, and who trusted *her* entirely.

But no. She shrunk from telling him, lest, in his high, pure sense of truth and honor, he should judge her too sternly; lest he should despise her for the deception she had felt forced to practice in the world; lest he should discard her and never see her more.

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The thought was death!

She could not lose him. She could not even risk the slightest chance of losing him. She must have him, be the consequences what they might. She must have him, or die!

But, oh! her little child! Well, she resolved that she would not desert that child. Although she could not acknowledge her, yet she would not desert her. She would go to New York before her marriage and make an ample provision for little Musette, and leave her with the good women who were now taking care of her.

And she hoped that, perhaps, after her marriage with August Carew, after she should have proved her devoted love to him as only a wife could prove it, after she should have secured and riveted his attachment to herself, beyond the possibility of his breaking it, *then* she might contrive some means of bringing the child under her own roof. She might adopt it as an orphan, or she might possibly bring herself to confess her former marriage, and acknowledge the child as her own.

Come! she thought, her position was not so desperate, after all. She would write to Bertie, and obtain, on demand, a release from her promise to him. She would provide for her child. And she would marry August Carew! Whatever might happen, she would marry August Carew.

Having devised this thoroughfare through her difficulties, and having persuaded herself that it would be a safe one, Musa arose and rearranged her dress, and went downstairs, where she found August and Mrs. Carew *tête-à-tête* in the oak-panelled parlor.

As soon as Musa appeared at the door, August arose and met her. He drew her arm within his own, and led her up to the elder lady, and said:

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"My dear mother, Miss Percie is to be my wife."

"The mischief she is!" was the reception Kate Carew gave to this announcement. "Well, I suppose, it is fate. So have it your own way, Musa, though you might have done better. You might have been the Duchess of Montcalla. But have your own way. It is fate."

"A very happy fate! Will you not congratulate us?" inquired August, with a smile.

"Here is Mrs. Shrewsbury; it is more in her line than in mine. She will do it for me," laughed Mrs. Carew, as the old lady entered the room.

"No, Kate, I entreat you. Stay! Say nothing to her, or to any one else, for the present," implored Musa, in a low voice.

"All right; I am mum," answered Mrs. Carew, laughing.

Madam Chief-Justice sailed up to the fire-place, but did not take the seat that Mr. Carew promptly placed for her.

She had come to break up the circle, she said, that every one might go to bed, and get a good night's rest, so that they might be up early in the morning, in time to breakfast comfortably and get ready for the boats.

"Your boat, Kate, for Richmond, usually gets here between seven and eight in the morning and ours for Washington about ten. So *you* must be up early, at any rate, if you want to catch it. And as we would like to see you off, why, it follows, as a matter of course, that we must be up equally early," added the old lady.

The company assented to the prudence of her advice, and in a few moments bade her and each other good-night and retired to rest.

Early the next morning the whole party reassembled for the last time at the breakfast-table of Bay Beauty. And

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after a comfortable meal, they all walked down to the pier to wait for the boat.

"I am to come to you at Christmas to claim your hand, dearest Musa, remember," whispered August Carew.

"Yes, you have my pledge," she answered in the same low key.

"But it will be hard to stay away from you so long. May I not come to see you in the meantime, once or twice?" he inquired.

"Come as often and stay as long as you please," answered Musa, who loved her betrothed too devotedly to use any finesse on this occasion.

"Heaven bless you for your kind, frank words! Good-bye, my best beloved," he whispered, pressing her hand before he stepped forward to hand Mrs. Kate Carew across the gang-plank into the steamer.

In another moment he was on the deck of the steamer, which was just putting off from the pier.

In a few minutes the Washington steamer came puffing up to the pier. They were all soon on board, the boat steaming rapidly before wind and tide for the entrance of the Potomac river.

After a cold but rather pleasant voyage of two days, the steamer reached the wharf at the foot of Sixth Street, Washington City.

Musa's carriage, horses and servants awaited her party on the landing.

Leaving all their baggage in the charge of a footman, to be forwarded to the house, the party entered the large carriage, and were driven at once home to Vermont Avenue.

After tea, Musa, leaving the ladies of her household to their own devices, and leaving her servants to attend to the

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unpacking and arranging of her wardrobe, went and locked herself up in the library to write to Bertie.

She found the task the most difficult one that she had ever undertaken to do. It occupied her the whole afternoon. She wrote and tore up many letters before she got one to suit her.

In writing to the young Duke, she threw herself upon his generosity.

She told him that she had never loved him but as a very dear brother; she reminded him that she had never even professed to do so.

She prayed him to remember that she had never given him any reason to believe she could ever marry him, though she had rashly promised never to marry any one else.

She entreated now to be released from that promise; because when she made it, she did not know her own heart. And she added that *he* had known her heart better than she had, when he prophesied that she would love again. This prophecy, she told him, had been fulfilled. She could not help it. It was her fate.

Ending as she had begun, she threw herself on his generosity.

When she had signed, sealed, and directed this letter, she felt that she had done a very cruel and selfish thing. She was pierced to the heart by compassion and remorse. Yet not for that would she pause in her course. She must break with Bertie, and she must marry August Carew, let the consequences be what they might.

On Saturday, at the breakfast table, she announced to the ladies of her household that she should go to New York on Monday, for a few days. Her sudden and erratic movements had ceased to surprise her friends. So they made

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no comment beyond expressing a wish that she might have a pleasant journey.

On Monday morning, Musa, attended by her faithful old servant Cassy, took the early train to New York, where she arrived late in the afternoon.

Without stopping in the city, she went straight to the Hudson River train of the hour, and ran up to Inwood, where she arrived just as the sun was sinking behind the Palisades on the west bank of the river.

She had not notified the inmates of the cottage of her intended arrival. She wished to take them by surprise, and see how she should find her child, when they did not expect her.

Intending to go right in upon the family, when they got up to the top of the wooded bank, on which the cottage stood, they went around the garden wall, and entered by the back gate.

As they walked up a path covered by a grape-vine arbor to the back door, they saw the back windows suddenly illuminated, as if the lamps had just that moment been lighted. But the shutters were not yet closed.

"Hush, Cassy! Tread softly. I wish to look in at the windows and see what my baby is doing, if she is there," whispered Musa, as she crept up to the wall.

She stood on one side and peeped through the lighted window, and this was what she saw in the back parlor:

Near the window, on a low stool, with his back toward her, sat Sam Seaforth, and before him stood her dark-eyed baby, whose tiny hands Sam was holding, while he talked to her and tried to teach her to stand alone.

"All alony—lony! All alony now for Sam!" he said, as he let go her little fingers gradually.

She stood alone for an instant, and then with a deprecat-

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ing little laugh, she fell forward, with her hands grabbing his knees.

He was trying the experiment over again, when Musa whispered to Cassy:

"The baby is all right, nurse. See how healthy she looks and how happy she is. Now let us go around to the front door and ring," she added with a delighted smile, as she softly withdrew from the window and passed along the side of the cottage wall and around to the front door.

As she came in front, quite accidentally she saw through another lighted window into the front parlor. And this is what she saw there: Under the full blaze of a hanging chandelier, seated on a *tête-à-tête* sofa, was pretty, rosy Maggie Seaforth and—the Rev. Mr. Wilks, ex-travelling preacher and present schoolmaster. The parson was sitting so close to the widow that it was impossible to be mistaken as to the meaning of that scene.

Musa smiled as she hurried by the window and rang the bell at the front door.

The door was opened by Mary Morris, whose blooming face, at the sight of the visitor, became as pale as that of a corpse.

"Why, Mary, what is the matter? Don't you know me?" Musa inquired.

"Oh, yes, ma'am, I do; I know you well enough. And I know you have come to ta—ta—take my baby away from me!" exclaimed the young foster-nurse, bursting into tears and sobbing aloud.

"Why, I have not come to do anything of the sort, you foolish girl! Come, let me in. Do you want to keep me standing out here in the cold all night?"

"Oh! I beg your pardon, ma'am, I'm sure. Do come in."

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Mary Morris led the way to the door of the back parlor.

"Stop, let me go in quietly by myself first," said Musa, as she glided past the young woman, and softly opened the door and entered.

What she saw now pleased her even more than what she had first seen through the window.

The boy Sam Seaforth held the child in his arms up before a fine life-sized, half-length oil painting of herself, Musa, and he was teaching the little creature to kiss her hand to her mother's picture and to say "mamma."

"Kiss hand to mamma. Pretty mamma!" said the boy.

And the baby smacked her little hand with her lips, and lisped, "Mam—mam——"

At that moment the boy turned around with the baby in his arms, and the child, seeing the living original of the picture standing there, stretched out her little hands, crying:

"Mam—mam!"

"She knows me. She knows me," said Musa, smiling through happy tears, as she caught the child to her bosom, and sank with her into one of the crimson arm-chairs.

"I was *bound* not to let her forget you, ma'am. Cause it was my duty not to," solemnly said the lad.

"That is right. Always try to do your duty, Sam," said Musa, gravely.

"Yes, I will; but for all that, if mammy marries the parson, I am going to run away and go to sea, I am *that!* I can't stand so many step-fathers."

And before Musa could rebuke him for his reckless words, some one came out of the front parlor, and there

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was the sound of leave-takings, and the noise of the front door clanging to, and the next moment Mrs. Seaforth came into the back parlor.

"Why, my *dear* Mrs. White! I hadn't the least notion that you were here. When did you come?" inquired Maggie Seaforth in surprise, as she held out her hand to her patroness.

"I came by the evening train—the last one. I have run on to spend my baby's birthday with her. Don't you know she will be one year old on Wednesday?"

"Will she now, indeed, ma'am? I knew it was some time this month, but I had forgotten the day. La! how time flies!" mused Mrs. Seaforth.

"Look ahere, white 'oman!" cried Cassy to the nurse. "An't yer gwine to give nobody no supper to-night? Here have me an' my mistess been travellin' all day long on de realroad cares, 'out nuffin to eat but them there nasty, chalky, windy slabs of dry dough and tar as they calls *pastry*. I 'clar my mistess couldn't touch 'em. No more could I. They turned my stomick, and so now we want somethin' to eat."

"Oh, indeed, yes! Mary Morris, if you will attend Mrs. White to her room, and see that she has everything comfortable there, I will go into the kitchen and get the supper, so that she can have it all ready by the time she comes down again. And Sam can mind the baby," said Mrs. Seaforth.

Musa, who was longing to get some of the railroad dust and soot off her face and hands, promptly put little Musette into the arms of her boy nurse, and followed Mary Morris up-stairs.

When she went down, an excellent supper awaited her in the back parlor. And when she sat down to the table,

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little Musette was put in an infant's high chair and placed by her side.

Musa retired very soon after supper, and took her baby to bed with her.

And that night the bereaved young foster-mother missed the child from her own bosom so much that she cried all night about it.

"And to think that some day she will take the baby away from me altogether, and I shall never see her again. Oh! it would kill me!" was the burden of all Mary Morris's thoughts.

Musa spent nearly a month at Inwood, receiving all her letters through Mr. Locke, who forwarded them from Washington, and Mr. Haughton, at whose office in the city she regularly called for them.

During her stay, Musa made an ample provision for her child, and constituted Mr. I. V. Haughton, of No. 8 Judiciary Place, New York, guardian of its person and trustee of its property.

On the first of December she took a most sorrowful leave of her lovely child, pressing it fervently to her bosom, gazing into its dark, loving, wistful eyes, kissing it with wild ardor, and finally placing it in the arms of its nurse, and earnestly, passionately, commending it to her care.

She reached home the next morning, and after a refreshing toilet and a nourishing breakfast, she lay down on the sofa in her sitting-room to rest herself, while she listened to the old lady's news. For Mrs. Shrewsbury had news to tell which she had wisely deferred until after breakfast.

First, then, the marriage of her son with the heiress of Pirate's Peak would have to be deferred, on account of the death of Mrs. Colonel Carew, which had just occurred, after a short, sharp attack of pneumonia.

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Secondly, Musa would lose the company of her "friend" Miss Sutton, for this season, because that young lady had just been called to the sick-bed of her mother, who was hopelessly ill of consumption.

Before Musa could digest all this ill news, Mrs. Shrewsbury drew from her pocket a parcel of letters tied together, which she handed to Musa, saying:

"And here, my love, are the letters that have accumulated for you in the last two days. Mr. Locke brought the English letter here last night, instead of sending it on by mail, as he knew you were expected home this morning."

"The English letter!" exclaimed Musa, in excitement, and all sense of fatigue vanished as she started up and held out her hand for the packet.

Casting all the other letters aside, as of little worth, she picked out the London letter and hastily tore it open.

She fully expected that this was Bertie's reply to her petition for a release from her promise to him, and that it would certainly be the release she sought.

It was indeed a letter from the young Duke of Montcalla; but it was not in the least what she anticipated that it would be. On the contrary, its contents filled her with amazement.

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CHAPTER XVII.

BERTIE'S DECISION—MARRIAGE—NEMESIS.

BERTIE'S letter to Musa was as follows:

MONTCALLA HOUSE, Kensington,
November 20th, 18—.

MY DEAREST MUSA: Your letter did not in the least take me by surprise. It was but the realization of my forebodings, the fulfillment of my prophecy. Do you remember? Nor did it give the "offense" that you deprecated.

What happened is natural, is in order, was to be expected. I have no word of blame for that, or of censure for you, my dearest friend, whom I would have made my beloved wife.

(Now let that pass.)

But though your communication affected me neither with surprise nor anger, I cannot say that it did not fill my mind with anxiety on your account.

My dear, enthusiastic, impulsive Musa! Is the man upon whom you have set your heart, and for whose sake you have thrown me over, worthy of you? That is the question for me to consider.

Of course you will say—"Yes;" with all the earnestness of your soul—"Yes;" and a thousand times—"Yes."

But that does not satisfy me. I must see and know and judge for myself, before I release you from your promise. If I find him worthy of you, I will set you free to marry him. If I find him unworthy of you, I will hold you to the sacred vow sworn upon the Holy Word, and which you dare not break.

This letter goes by the *Suez*, which sails to-morrow morning from Liverpool.

I shall follow it by the *Darien*, which sails from Southampton three

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days hence. Watch, therefore, for the *Darien*, and expect to see me within twenty-four hours after her arrival.

May the Lord bless you, my dearest Musa, and may He guide us aright. Ever your faithful friend,

MONTCALLA.

Musa let the letter fall from her hands, while she covered her face, and shuddered with dismay.

"Bertie coming here! Bertie resolved to see and sit in judgment on August Carew before releasing me from my vow, and allowing me to marry him!" she thought, with consternation.

"And he may be here to-morrow, to-day, this hour! The *Suez* arrived two days ago. It is quite possible the *Darien* may have come in last night or this morning. He may be here any moment. Oh! what shall I do? How shall I meet Bertie? And, oh, good Heaven! how shall I bear to introduce him to August?" she mentally added, in great alarm.

Then she rang the bell.

"Bring me the morning papers," she said to the footman who answered the summons.

John brought the *Globe*, the *Union*, and the *Intelligencer*, and laid them on the table before his mistress.

Musa took up the last-named paper, turned to the "Marine Intelligence," and read:

"NEW YORK, December 3d.

"The steamship *Darien*, from Southampton on the 23d ultimo, arrived at this port last night."

"Bertie will be here to-night! He will be here to-night! Great Heaven! what shall I do? Yes, he will walk in upon us to-night. He said I must expect him within twenty-four hours after the arrival of the *Darien*. That

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is, I *think* he did. Let me look and be sure," said Musa to herself, as, all in a tremor, she took up his letter and read it over again to confirm her thought.

And now, in this second reading, she perceived and appreciated that which, in her utter self-absorption during the first reading, she had entirely overlooked and ignored —that was Bertie's utter self-forgetfulness, in which he refrained from all reproach, from all complaint; and thought and wrote only of her happiness, and of her welfare.

"Oh, generous, noble, and dear Bertie! How much too good you always were for me! Oh, how I hope, how I do hope, you may soon meet some young lady a thousand times prettier, better, worthier than I ever was, whom you will love a thousand times more than you ever loved me; and who will love you—even as I love August Carew!" she exclaimed, pressing his letter to her lips, while her tears fell fast upon it.

At that moment the footman entered with a card on a silver waiter, which he handed his mistress, saying:

"The gentleman is in the drawing-room, Miss."

"It is Bertie!" thought Musa, with a spasm of the heart, as she took up and looked at the card.

But no. The little slip of enamelled pasteboard bore the name of—

"Francis August Carew."

"Tell the gentleman that I will be down in a moment," said Musa, in glad surprise, as she started up and hurried to her dressing-room, to adorn her beauty for him whose presence was renewed life.

She sat down before her dressing table, re-arranged her glossy black tresses in their own natural ringlets, and then changed the soft quilled silk wrapper in which she had

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lounged all day, for a home dress of crimson moire, trimmed with deep flounces of black guipure lace, and finished with a bertha of the same. This rich dark toilet was lighted up by jewelry of pearls and rubies.

As she gave a last look at her mirror, her eyes sparkled and her cheeks flushed with delight in her own regal beauty, and in the power it gave her to win and keep the love of one who was now dearer to her than her own soul.

Sparkling and glowing with life and love, she passed down-stairs and entered the drawing-room.

August Carew was standing at one of the front windows, but he turned immediately and came, with extended hands and radiant smile, to meet her.

"I received your letter, notifying me that you would be here to-day, dearest, and I took the first boat that left for Washington. I drove from the landing directly here. Have I come too soon?" he inquired, when they were seated side by side on the sofa.

"Oh, no. You could not come too soon. I am so glad you came directly to us. Mrs. Shrewsbury is your aunt, you know. And it will be quite right that you should stop with us during your stay in Washington," answered Musa, frankly and warmly.

"Thanks, dearest. My only errand to the city is to see you. But for you, my love and life, I should scarcely ever come here," said August, holding and pressing her hand.

"Then, of course, that is another reason why you must 'bide' with us," said Musa, with a smile.

"And how soon shall you come to 'bide' with me forever, dearest? That is not settled yet, you know. How soon?" he earnestly inquired.

"Just as soon as may be. Oh, August, I have no will

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to part with you, even for a day. I have no one in the world but you. I am so singularly alone, without parents, without brothers or sisters, without even collateral relatives. I have no one but you. And I *want* no one but you!" she added, passionately, forgetting, for the moment, the child, who should have been the first in the mother's heart.

"I am and I will be *all* to you. I swear it, dearest. But when, when will you come and be with me forever?"

Musa paused and reflected for a moment.

"See, love," he continued, "I am preparing to receive you. A month ago I put a squad of workmen into our Richmond house, to renovate it thoroughly. They will have finished it by Christmas. When, dear Musa, will you come and inhabit it?"

"We must speak with Mrs. Shrewsbury first. She is your relative, your oldest living relative, I think, and she is my chaperon. She has not yet been told of our engagement," replied Musa.

"She must be told to-day," added August.

And even as he spoke, the door was swung open by the footman, and Mrs. Chief-Justice Shrewsbury sailed into the room.

Mr. Carew arose to receive her.

"How do you do, August? This is really quite a pleasant surprise. When did you arrive? How did you leave Kate?" inquired Mrs. Shrewsbury, giving her hand to her nephew, and then sinking slowly into a large easy-chair.

Mr. Carew answered all her questions, and then took the hand of Musa, and led her up to the elder lady, and said:

"Aunt Shrewsbury, I know how warmly you love and

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esteem Miss Percie. And I know, therefore, how rejoiced you will feel to hear that she is to be more closely connected with you by marriage. Miss Percie is to be your niece."

Mrs. Chief-Justice was surprised out of her usual stately propriety.

"What is all this?" she said. "Why, I thought she was engaged to the——" Then recovering, she resumed her self-command, and said, more slowly and guardedly:

"I am very glad to hear it, my dear August. I wish you both much happiness, with all my heart. When is the wedding to come off? Has the day been fixed?"

"The day has not been fixed. But Miss Percie has promised to do it now," answered Mr. Carew, with an appealing look to Musa.

"When will it be, Musa? You know that I should have the earliest information, my dear girl," said Mrs. Chief-Justice.

"Early in the new year," said Musa, hesitatingly—"the first Tuesday in January."

"Ah, that will fall on the seventh of the month. It is a very short time," commented the old lady, with a deep sigh.

Musa read her anxious thought, and answered it.

"My dear Mrs. Shrewsbury," said she, kindly, "our marriage shall not break up this home that you have presided over with such excellent taste and tact. We shall keep it on as a winter home. For I think that we shall like to spend the season in Washington. And you, I hope, will still remain in it, in precisely the same position and under the same conditions as now."

"Thanks, Musa, my love. You have, indeed, been as a daughter to me ever since we first met," said the old lady, with more feeling than any one would have given her credit

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for possessing. "But what will your husband say to this arrangement?" she inquired, rather anxiously.

"I believe that I have spoken August's sentiments. Is it not so?" questioned the bride elect, turning with a smile to her betrothed.

"Assuredly," answered Mr. Carew, with cheerful promptitude.

"And think, Mrs. Shrewsbury, how pleasant it will be for us all. We shall all gather here every winter as usual, under your wing—Clarice, Horace, Armida, August, myself and Kate."

"That will be very pleasant, my love. But are you always going to call your future mother-in-law 'Kate?'" inquired the formal old lady.

Musa broke into a silvery laugh.

"The idea of Kate being a mother-in-law! Yes, I shall always call her Kate. I am not going to make an old woman of bonny Kate by calling her anything else."

As Musa was still laughing, the door was once more swung wide open, and—

"The Duke of Montcalla," was announced.

While Musa's heart was throbbing stormily, Bertie entered with a bow and a sweeping glance that seemed to include the three persons present, and then he walked straight up to Mrs. Shrewsbury, who arose to welcome him.

"Delighted to see your Grace," said Mrs. Shrewsbury, as the young Duke paid his respects. "So, I am sure, is Miss Percie, who is here," she added.

Bertie turned and shook hands with Musa, and tried to meet her eyes, but they were lowered to the carpet, while her flushed cheeks grew suddenly pale.

"And here is my nephew, Mr. Carew of Raven Rocks, who has not yet had the honor of meeting your Grace.

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Mr. Carew, the Duke of Montcalla," continued Mrs. Shrewsbury, too much engaged in doing the honors of the house to observe the pallor and agitation of Musa.

The gentlemen thus presented to each other bowed, and exchanged some words of courteous greeting.

And in another moment Bertie was seated among them.

It was well that August Carew knew nothing of the former proposal of marriage from the young Duke to Musa Percie. Such knowledge might have somewhat embarrassed his intercourse with the visitor. But as the case now stood, his manner was free and courteous.

And Bertie, to all eyes but Musa's, was as courteous, free, and gay as he ever had been.

Musa saw with deep compunction that he had lost all the vivid bloom and freshness of his youth, and that the maintenance of his easy manner was an effort to him.

Mrs. Shrewsbury pressed the young Duke to remain and dine with them. And Bertie frankly accepted the invitation.

Mrs. Shrewsbury withdrew from the room to interview the housekeeper and cook, in honor of the unexpected guests who were added to the family dinner-party.

Bertie drew Mr. Carew into conversation on the leading topics of the day—that engaged the attention of all philanthropists both in England and America—Emancipation of the Nations, Elevation of the Masses, Education of Poor Children, Reclamation of Criminals, Reform of Prisons, Revision of Laws, and so forth.

Musa listened, occasionally joining in the conversation.

As Bertie warmed in debate, he seemed to forget his troubles, and to recover all his former youthful vivacity and earnestness. There was nothing of the "languid swell" about this hearty young English nobleman.

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"He will forget me in a little time. He will throw himself into the grand work of the nineteenth century, and forget me, as I ought to be forgotten—by him," said Musa to herself as she watched him.

Dinner came on in due course.

And in the evening their circle was augmented by the arrival of Mr. Lyttleton Locke and several other gentlemen.

Bertie talked mostly to August Carew and Mrs. Shrewsbury.

He told them that he should soon leave Washington to join a party of young Englishmen, who were at present at New Orleans, *en route* for the Plains, where they intended to hunt, or, as Bertie amended his speech, to *try* to hunt, the buffalo. He added that he did not expect to be in London again before the meeting of Parliament, in February.

"When you will take your seat for the first time in the House of Peers," said Mrs. Shrewsbury.

"Yes, Madam," gravely assented the young Duke, with a bow.

Soon after this, he arose to take leave.

But last of all, he bade good-bye to Musa. He took her hand, and detained it in his own for a moment. He met her eyes in one thrilling gaze of devotion, of renunciation, and then bowed over her hand, dropped it, and left the room.

Musa stood with her hand fallen to her side as he had dropped it, her face bowed upon her bosom, and her eyes fixed upon the carpet, in such a strange, oblivious, trance-like state, in the midst of her mixed company, that August Carew came at length to her side and led her to a seat.

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"The young Duke is a great admirer of you, Musa," said August Carew, as he stood near the head of the sofa upon which she reclined.

"He is as noble by nature as he is by birth. He is the very best friend I have in the whole world, except yourself. And—he saved my life once, at the imminent risk of his own," sighed Musa.

"God bless him!" earnestly added August.

The next morning the little family party that gathered around the breakfast-table consisted of Mrs. Shrewsbury, Musa and August Carew. Just as breakfast was over, the postman knocked, and all arose from the table and separated to read their letters.

Musa received but one, and that was sealed with the crest of the Duke of Montcalla.

She withdrew to the privacy of her own room to read it.

"GADSBY'S, Dec. 5th, 18—.

"MY DEAREST MUSA: I have seen and I approve your choice. I release you of your vow to me. You are free. Before you receive this I shall be *en route* for New Orleans. I cannot trust myself to say good-bye to you in person. But—God bless you. MONTCALLA."

Musa cried a little over this letter, pressed it to her lips, then dropped it in the fire, and breathed a silent prayer for Bertie's happiness.

An hour after that, oblivious of Bertie's renunciation and sorrow, arrayed in a most becoming habit, mounted on a fine horse, and attended by her lover, she was cantering briskly along the margin of Rock Creek, enjoying her morning ride, as she never had enjoyed it before.

August Carew remained for a week at Vermont Avenue, and might have lingered longer had not Mrs. Shrewsbury given him a hint that the strict rules of etiquette required his absence just now.

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Then, laughing at these absurd "rules of etiquette," he reluctantly took leave, to remain away until the morning of the marriage, when he should meet his bride at the church.

After the departure of August Carew the preparations for the wedding went on rapidly.

About one thousand invitations were sent out for the ceremony. And about one hundred for the breakfast.

In due time, answers came to all these special letters. And all these answers were acceptances, except in one case —that of Armida Sutton, who replied that she could not leave the sick-bed of her mother, even to officiate as Miss Percie's first bride's-maid.

Musa's eight bride's-maids were then selected from among the youngest and prettiest girls of her acquaintance. And they all accepted her invitation to take part in the beautiful pageant.

Musa's wedding dress and trousseau had been ordered from a New York house, and were expected to arrive a week before the wedding-day.

Mrs. Shrewsbury complained that it was awkward having a wedding immediately after New-year's, as it interfered so seriously with Christmas and New-year's festivities.

Musa astonished and disgusted Mrs. Shrewsbury by starting off on the morning of Christmas Eve for a flying visit to New York. Her ostensible reason was to look after her trousseau. Her real reason was to press her child once more to her heart, to spend Christmas with her, and to load her and her protectors with Christmas presents.

On this occasion Musa went unattended, not even taking old Cassy with her.

She reached Inwood on the night of Christmas Eve. She found her little girl well and thriving as ever, but, as

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it seemed to the weeping mother, the child's meek, dark eyes looked more mournful than ever they had looked before. They had a loving, pleading expression in their dark depths that almost broke the mother's heart to meet.

"If I should never see you again! Ah, my tender, dove-eyed darling, if I should never see you again!" she cried, weeping over her child, as she pressed her to her bosom that night when they were alone.

She stayed with Musette two days, and then, after passionate, heart-rending embraces, she placed her in the arms of her foster-mother, commending the child to the woman's care, and set out for her return to Washington.

On arriving at Vermont Avenue she found all the Carews and all the Howards there, settled in their rooms. They had arrived the day before.

After bidding them all welcome to her house, Musa retired to her own apartment.

At this hour she was no happy bride! She was half heart-broken from the parting with her child and the uncertainty of her future.

She relieved her oppressed heart by a copious fit of weeping, and then she arose and rang the bell.

Old Cassy answered the summons, and entering the room, greeted her mistress with much affection.

"And how you fine de little gal, honey?" inquired the nurse.

"Well, Cassy, quite well, and well taken care of. But, oh, Cassy! oh, Cassy!" exclaimed the young mother, with a fresh burst of weeping.

"Now, what 's de matter wid you now, honey? If de chile is well, what you cryin' 'bout?"

"Oh, Cassy! oh, Cassy! I feel as if I were deserting my poor baby! You know that after my wedding-day, I shall

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no longer be my own mistress as I am now. I cannot go and come long journeys as I do now. And, oh, if I should never see my little child again!" exclaimed Musa, abandoning herself to a paroxysm of weeping and sobbing.

Cassy made no reply, but sat down on a low stool, dropped her head in her hands and groaned at intervals, until her mistress had wept and sobbed herself into a state of comparative quietness.

Then the old nurse opened her mouth and spoke like an oracle.

"F'om what you say, Miss Musa, I takes it as you an't done tell Marse Gus Carew nuffin' 'tall 'bout de chile?"

"Oh, no, no, no, Cassy! I have told Mr. Carew nothing."

"Well, den, honey, you mus' tell him eberyfing."

"Oh, no, no, no, Cassy! I could not. I *never* could tell him that."

"Well, den, honey, dere an't but one oder way to do. You must gib him right up. Yes, far as fings *has* gone, you must gib him *right* up."

"Oh, no, no, no, Cassy! I could not. I never could give him up. It would kill me to do so."

"My good laws o' me alibe, honey! you *must* do eyether one fing or else the t'other. You *must* eider tell him all about it, or else gib him right up. There an't no other way, nohow."

"I cannot do either, Cassy. It is the punishment of my folly, and the curse of my life, that I cannot do either. For to do either would kill me!" exclaimed Musa, passionately, and covering her face with her hands.

"Look here, Miss Musa," said the old nurse, gravely, "I 'se a rough ole 'oman, and I knows it—one ob de mos' roughest as ebber was made—but I knows what 's right,

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and what you ought for to do, 'fore you ebber stans up before de Lord's altar along of Marse Gus, or any oder man. Now listen to me, Miss Musa. Is you a listenin' to me, honey?"

"Yes, yes," answered Musa, impatiently.

"Well, den, here 's where it is, honey. You an't done nuffin wrong yet. You was lawful married to de Early young gentleman, which I myse'f has heard him call you his dear wife a hundred times or more. An' your chile was born in lawful wedlock, as you calls it. Now, honey, you jest up and tell Marse Gus Carew all about it."

"Oh, Cassy——"

"Now don't you interrupt me, honey, jest yet. Jest wait till I 'm done. You jest up and tell Marse Gus all about it. How you was secretly married, and how he died, dout havin' ob a chance to 'knowledge you. And how your poor baby was a orphan before she was born. You tell Marse Gus all about it. Now *do*, honey. Den it will be offen your mind. Ef you don't tell him, it will always be on your mind like a millstone. You tell Marse Gus all about it. He lubs you, honey. He 'll do all he can to make you happy. He 'll act like de honorable gemman as he is. He 'll be just. He 'll 'dopt your little chile. Mind ef he don't. And lub her too. Mind ef he don't."

"Oh! Cassy, Cassy, that would make me *too* happy. Such a state of things would turn this earth into a heaven for me. But no! It is impossible! I cannot tell him! He thinks that I have never been married before. I cannot run the great risk of undeceiving him. I know not what effect that would have upon him."

"Look a here, honey! I an't no witch, thanks be to goodness. I nebber selled *my* mortal soul to de debbel for onlawful knowledge, and signed it wid a drap o' my blood.

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But for all dat, it seems to me as I can see trough and trough dat man, and I see as he has got a good, true, just, merciful heart, and one which is 'voted to you. Tell him eberyfing, honey, and he will believe you and comfort you. *But don't* 'ceive him, whatebber you do, honey, ef you wallys his lub. I don't fink as an hono'ble gemman like him could get ober being 'ceived. But tell him eberyfing, honey, and he will do anyfing you want him to do, to make you happy," pleaded the old nurse.

"Leave me, nurse, for a little while. I must think—I must think," said Musa.

"Yes, honey, think about it. And do it too, bless you, and you will be happy," answered the old woman, as she took herself out of the room.

Musa, left alone, walked up and down the floor in deeply perturbed thought.

"Oh, if I *could* tell him this sad story! If I could feel sure that he would receive it as my old nurse says! But I cannot be sure. No one can. And I dare not tell him—I dare not risk losing him. It would kill me to lose him. Oh, Heaven, to think that I must win him only by a concealment!" she cried, sinking once more upon the bed, in an agony of self-reproach.

And so her moral sense, roused by the plain words of her honest old nurse, warred with her inclinations, making her bosom like a battle-field. And this happened not once, but many times, when she found herself alone. But at other seasons, when in company, or when engaged in active preparations for her marriage, the voice of conscience was drowned in the confusion of tongues around her.

The glad New-year was at hand. But it was understood that Mrs. Chief-Justice Shrewsbury and Miss Percie would not hold their usual New-year's reception.

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In fact, they could not well do so without seriously interfering with the arrangements for the grand wedding, which were now going on rapidly, and were completed on the evening of Monday, the fifth.

The drawing-room was upholstered in white and silver, the dining-room in rose and gold, and the reception-room in blue and silver. The profuse floral decorations seemed to have transformed each room and hall into a temple of Flora.

The wedding breakfast table was set in the long dining-room. Its decorations were wonders of artistic beauty.

A curious and beautiful ornament occupied a large space on the centre of the table. It was an artificial miniature lake, formed by a large plate of looking-glass laid flat on the board, and surrounded by a bank of flowers, that were reflected in the mirror as in the clear, deep waters of a lake. Upon the middle of this mirror stood the wedding-cake, in the form of a rock rising from the lake, and surmounted by a temple with classic pillars, wreathed with bright and fragrant flowers.

The wedding morning dawned—a brilliant, dazzling, winter morning. The family in the house on Vermont Avenue were early astir. The bride's-maids were early on duty, but they waited together in a spare chamber, until the hour for going to church.

Clarice Howard claimed it as her especial privilege to dress the bride. And she was assisted only by Musa's faithful servants, Cassy and Servia.

Musa's dress, though it did not come from Paris, was as elegant as it was costly.

It consisted of a rich, heavy, white satin dress, made low on the neck and with short sleeves. It was trimmed with a bertha, sleeve ruffles and deep flounces of point-lace.

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Over this she wore a train of white Lyons velvet, lined with white silk and trimmed with swan's-down. Her ornaments were a set of superb opals, set in diamonds, the gift of the bridegroom. She did not wear orange flowers, but a wreath of rich white tea-roses crowned her beautiful black curls. And from that hung the bridal veil of fine point-lace. A heavy mantle of costly ermine lay ready to be put over her shoulders and worn during the drive to and from the church. But it was to be left in the carriage at the church-door.

Musa's bride's-maids wore rich white silk dresses, with fine white tulle over-dresses, and wreaths of white rose-buds.

Clarice Howard wore a pale blue silk, trimmed with white thread lace, a white Paisley shawl, and a white velvet bonnet, with white and blue flowers.

Kate Carew, in half mourning for her cousin, wore a rich black velvet dress, mantle, and bonnet.

Mrs. Shrewsbury, a brown satin dress and bonnet, and a deep sable fur cape and a muff.

Espirita Carew was in the deepest mourning for her mother; but she laid this mourning aside for one day, lest, she said, it should bring ill luck to the bride, and she wore a lavender-colored silk dress and bonnet, and a white fur cape and muff.

Six carriages were in attendance to take this company to the church, which was very much crowded; yet so perfectly still was the assemblage that every word of the impressive marriage ceremony could be heard in every part of the sacred place.

The books were opened, the exhortation was read, the momentous questions were asked and answered, the vows were made, the prayers were offered, the benediction bestowed, and all was over.

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Musa Percie, for good or for evil, was the wife of August Carew.

Many friends crowded around the bride to offer their congratulations; but all noticed that, in receiving them, her hand, through her glove, was icy cold, and her face was deathly white.

Mrs. Shrewsbury also noticed this, but attributed it to the chilly air of the chancel, and to the fatigue of the ceremony; and she whispered to her nephew:

"Put an end to this scene. Musa is almost overcome."

And August Carew drew his bride's arm within his own, bowed, and led her through the crowd and out of the church, and put her in his own carriage, into which he followed her. In a few minutes they drove up again before her house in Vermont Avenue.

A crowd of wedding guests, in a long procession of carriages, followed the bride from the church to the house. They soon filled all the rooms. And then the brilliant bustle of the wedding breakfast ensued, which lasted about three hours. And then the bride arose and withdrew, to change her wedding dress for a travelling suit of crimson Irish poplin and sable furs.

Musa chose to receive only the adieus of her nearest friends, and so she took leave of them in her own chamber.

Then she went out, and was met at the door by her husband, who was also dressed in a travelling suit.

He led her quietly from the house and put her in the carriage, and ordered the coachman to drive to the Richmond boat. For they were to spend their wintry honeymoon in that Southern city.

While Mr. Carew was giving minute directions to the coachman, Musa was settling herself comfortably among the cushions of the carriage. In doing so, she saw a letter

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in a white envelope stuck conspicuously under one of the straps on her right side.

Supposing it to be a business circular, she took it and opened it.

But her face was blanched to marble as she read:

"False woman, cruel mother, perjured bride, do you madly hope for a single moment's happiness in your married state? Undeceive yourself; for the avenger goes before you. Nemesis will meet you at Richmond."

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CHAPTER XVIII.

LOVE STRONG AS DEATH.

MUSA had scarcely time to thrust this cruel note out of sight in her pocket when August entered the carriage, and took his seat by her side.

The horses immediately started.

Musa lowered her thick, brown travelling veil, that August might not see her pale and agitated face.

"Are you cold, love?" he inquired, seeing her shiver and draw her furs around her.

"Yes; the day is turning bitterly cold, I think," answered Musa, in a low, tremulous voice.

"And you are over-fatigued, and not, therefore, in a condition to be exposed. There should have been a hot brick put into this carriage. Dear love, you shall never suffer from negligence again, now that you have me to take care of you," said August, as he picked up two or three loose shawls that lay upon the front seat, and awkwardly wrapped them about her shoulders and feet.

On arriving at the boat, Musa, in all her wrappings, was hurried on board, and then into the ladies' cabin.

She took the first opportunity, when she found herself unobserved, to draw the threatening letter from her pocket, and put it into the fire that was burning in the stove. And she watched the paper shrivel up and consume to ashes before she shut the stove door.

Then, with an effort, she controlled all outward expres-

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sion of the intense anxiety she suffered, and she even forced herself to converse with her husband with seeming ease and cheerfulness.

They had a very cold voyage down the Potomac, and down the Chesapeake, and up James River to Richmond, where they arrived on the evening of the second day.

Mr. Carew's carriage was standing at the wharf; August handed Musa into it, and gave the order:

"Home."

When the carriage drew up in front of the Carew mansion, the doors were thrown open, and a troop of well-trained servants, headed by the housekeeper, waited in the hall to receive the young master and mistress. August led Musa into the house, whispering words of fondest welcome to her.

"Mrs. Watson will see you to your room, my dear," he said, indicating the housekeeper, who now came forward.

Mrs. Watson was a respectable, middle-aged white woman, who at once offered her services to Musa, and took her up-stairs to a spacious and beautiful chamber, furnished in rose-color and white.

"How lovely this is!" said Musa, looking around with what, under happier auspices, would have been delight, but which was now only sorrowful approval and tender gratitude.

"Yes, ma'am, it is indeed perfectly lovely," assented Mrs. Watson. "And Mr. Carew had all this made to order under his own direction. And he selected all the little things, even to the mantel and toilet ornaments."

Musa shivered.

"You are cold, ma'am. The weather has been bitterly cold for the last two days. Come to the fire," said the housekeeper, pushing a comfortable arm-chair up to the

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fire-place, where a bright coal fire was burning in the polished steel grate.

Musa sank into the offered seat, and stretched her hands out toward the fire; but, ah, the chill that seized her then could not be dispelled by heat!

Nemesis—Nemesis was to meet her at Richmond! How? When? In what form?

These were the thoughts that seemed to turn her blood to ice.

Who was her unknown enemy? How had that enemy got possession of her secret, and thereby got control of her fate?

She could not conjecture, unless it had been by means of her lost letter.

While she sat shivering over these thoughts, the housekeeper, forgotten, stood waiting. At length Mrs. Watson ventured to ask:

"Can I be of any further use to you, ma'am?"

"No, thank you. I want nothing. You can go, if your duties require your presence elsewhere," Musa gently replied.

But, before the housekeeper could withdraw, steps were heard outside, followed by a rap at the chamber door.

"It is my baggage. Will you open the door, Mrs. Watson?" inquired Musa.

The housekeeper immediately obeyed, and old Cassy entered, followed by two of the men-servants, bearing between them a large Saratoga trunk, which they set down under the direction of their conductress, and then retired, followed by Mrs. Watson.

Musa said to Cassy:

"Will you open the trunk and lay out my maize-colored moire antique?"

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"Oh, yes, honey," said the old woman, drawing the bunch of keys from her pocket, and proceeding to business.

Musa never spent much time over her toilet. And so, in a few minutes, she changed her travelling dress of crimson Irish poplin for an evening dress of maize-colored moire antique, trimmed with white point applique flounces, and with bertha and sleeve-falls of the same lace.

She wore the set of opal jewelry that had been the bridal present of August. And she took a pale tea-rose from the vase of flowers on her dressing-table, and placed it in her hair.

She was ready to go down, but where was August?

He was closeted with "Nemesis," in the shape of Armida Sutton.

At the very moment that Musa had left his side to go to her own room, attended by the housekeeper, and as he himself was about to repair to his dressing-room, a card was put in his hand by the hall footman, who said in explanation:

"The lady arrived a few minutes ago, sir, and requested to see you alone as soon as you arrived."

"'Miss Armida Sutton!'" said Mr. Carew, reading the card. "This is most strange. Where did you show the lady?"

"In the crimson reception-room, sir."

August Carew, without a moment's delay, went to a small front room, on the right-hand of the entrance hall, known as the crimson reception-room. He opened the door and entered unannounced.

A glowing coal fire in a polished steel grate rather overheated this small room. Yet Armida, closely wrapped in furs, sat in a large, cushioned easy-chair before the fire.

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"Miss Sutton!" exclaimed Mr. Carew, scarcely able to repress his surprise and displeasure at her inopportune presence.

"You are astonished to see me here, Mr. Carew," she said, rising and facing him.

"Indeed, yes. But pray resume your seat. You seem wearied," he said, as he noticed the paleness of her face.

"I am wearied," she answered, with a sigh, as she sank again into the large arm-chair.

"Why, when did you arrive?" inquired Mr. Carew.

"But a few moments in advance of yourself. In fact, I left Washington and came down to Richmond on the same boat that brought yourself."

"Is that possible? You were on the boat with us? And we did not know it? How could that have been?" inquired Mr. Carew, in astonishment.

"I had a state-room in the lower cabin. And I never left it," answered Armida, with a strange smile.

"Did my wife know that you were there?"

"No."

"Did she expect you here?"

"No."

"Does she know that you have arrived?"

"No."

"Pardon me. I have been rudely putting questions, when I should rather have hastened to notify Mrs. Carew of the presence of her friend," said Mr. Carew, as he stretched his hand toward the bell.

"Stop!" exclaimed Armida, arresting his hand.

He paused and gazed at her now in undisguised amazement.

"Stop, Mr. Carew. My visit is to yourself alone. I requested to see you for a few moments *alone*. I have

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something of the most vital importance to yourself to say, but you had better sit down, sir. I cannot talk to a man who stands and stares at me."

"I beg pardon," said Mr. Carew. And he sat down immediately, attentive.

"In the first place, Mr. Carew, I must ask you whether or not you received certain important letters, post-marked Rockville?" inquired Armida.

"Anonymous letters?" question Mr. Carew, in his turn.

"Yes, necessarily anonymous."

"I did," grimly replied August Carew.

"And—read them?" exclaimed Armida, in surprise.

"No, Miss Sutton. I read only the *first* one. It touched the honor of a lady I revere. As soon as I gathered its meaning I threw it into the fire. And the half-dozen, or more, of letters in the same handwriting that followed it at intervals, I burned as they came, without even opening them."

"I am sorry you did that. And I think, before our interview is ended, that *you* will be sorry also," said Armida, gravely. "*I* wrote those anonymous letters from Rockville," she added, fixing her cold blue eyes full upon his face.

"I am deeply shocked to hear you say it, Miss Sutton."

"I wished to warn you of great peril to your peace and honor. I wished to save you from great sorrow and humiliation. If you had deigned to read those letters, you would have been warned, and must have been saved. It was a very delicate matter for a lady, especially for a young unmarried lady, to interfere in. Nothing but the highest sense of duty urged me to move in such a matter. And at

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first I confess that I was too timid to sign my own name to my notes of warning. I now deeply regret my own want of moral courage, and your want of faith. And I come now, with great pain, to repair, as far as I am able, the evil that my moral cowardice and your distrust have wrought. Though, indeed, I fear it is too late to do any good, except for the poor, forsaken child."

"Child?" echoed Mr. Carew.

"Yes, Musa Percie's poor, forsaken child."

"Miss Sutton!"

"Mr. Carew?"

"You are a lunatic. And it is only because I am now sure that you are a lunatic, that I do not——"

"Show me the door? Well, yes; I expected something like that. But before you show me the door, Mr. Carew, will you please to read this, and form your own opinion on it," she said, placing an enveloped letter in his hand.

"Is it anonymous?" he curtly demanded.

"No, indeed. Read it."

He looked at the envelope. It was post-marked New York, February 1st.

He opened it, and read as follows:

"WILLOW COTTAGE, HARLEM, N. Y., Feb. 1st, 18—.

"MY DEAR MRS. WHITE—I write to inform you that your baby is very ill. She was taken in the night with her throat. I sent for the doctor this morning. And he prescribed for her, but she is no better. I write to you by the very first mail. Old Cassy thinks that you had better come on immediately. In the meantime I and the doctor will do all that we can to save her. Respectfully yours,

"MARGARET SEAFORTH."

"And pray, what has this letter to do with me or my wife?" sternly demanded August Carew, when he had finished the reading.

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"Merely this," coolly responded Armida—"that Musa Percie and Mrs. White are one and the same person. Her child is at nurse with a poor widow named Margaret Seaforth, the writer of that letter, and who knows the child's mother only as Mrs. White. Mrs. Seaforth lived at Willow Cottage, Harlem, where she, assisted by Musa's confidential servant, old Cassy, took care of the deserted babe. Since that I have discovered, by following up the clue, that the widow Seaforth has removed with her charge to a house called the Brown Cottage at Inwood, on the Hudson. Old Cassy returned to her mistress about the time of that removal."

"Miss Sutton," exclaimed Mr. Carew, rousing himself from the spell-bound state in which he had listened to her words, "I do not believe one syllable of the atrocious calumnies you have uttered against the pure name of my beloved wife. Nothing but a suspicion of your insanity has led me to endure your presence here thus long, and now——"

"You wish to show me out? Do not take that trouble. I am going. But show that letter to your wife. Watch her as she reads it. Notice how she looks, what she says. And, oh! when by her looks and actions, if not by her words, she shall have confessed her sin—however you may see fit to deal with her—exhort her, I beg you, to atone for the past by taking care of her innocent child. Tell her that deeply as she has sinned——"

"I will hear no more!" fiercely interrupted August Carew. "I have listened too long to these infamous slanders. I will not hear another word. I shall, indeed, take this letter to my beloved and honored wife, but it will only be to consult with her how best to deal with her calumniators. And now, Miss Sutton, leave my house at once

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and never return to it, lest I should forget that I am a gentleman, and that you are, or ought to be, a lady."

"Oh, I am going. Never fear that I shall trouble you again. Show that letter to your wife! *Do*, Mr. Carew! Good-night."

And with a mocking courtesy, Armida Sutton left the room and the house.

August Carew had never been in such a rage in all his life.

If any man had spoken and acted as Armida Sutton had done—well, there would probably have been a trial for murder, and the jury would have acquitted the prisoner without leaving their seats.

Musa sat still in her chamber, waiting for August to come and take her down to dinner.

She thought that he was very long in coming, and she arose and changed the tea-rose in her hair for a fresher one from the vase.

And then, just as she resumed her seat, the door opened, and her husband entered.

She arose at once to accompany him down-stairs.

But he stopped her by lifting his hand.

"No, sit still, my love. I have something curious to show you, and something still more curious to tell you. You will soon see that you will have to use discretion, my beloved, in the choice of your associates, and even in the distribution of your charities," he said, as he drew a seat to her side, and unfolded the letter in his hand.

She looked at him with smiling eyes, for she thought he was going to admonish her—as her old lawyer guardian so often did—on her bad habit of indiscriminate and excessive alms-giving.

"Will you read this letter, my love, and tell me who is

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the Mrs. White and who is the child referred to in it?" he gently inquired, putting the letter in his wife's hands.

The next instant he was appalled by the effect of his own act.

Musa's head fell back against her chair; her face grew ghastly in its awful pallor; her features were drawn with anguish; her hands fell helpless by her side.

"Musa—Musa, my dearest! what is all this?" cried August Carew, starting up and bending over her in alarm. "Speak to me, dear wife!"

"I was born with the curse upon me! I was born to bring ruin on myself and on all I love! I was born with the curse upon me, and the curse is fulfilled to-day!" she wailed, in a voice of such utter woe that her husband was appalled as he heard her.

Yet not even now, when gazing on her, did he for one instant suspect her of any wrong-doing. He was deeply troubled by her misery.

"Great Heaven, Musa!" he cried, "*who* is this erring woman in whose case you take so deep an interest as to make it your own?—for whom you agonize as for yourself, or your sister?"

"*Oh-h-h!*" she groaned, "that case *is* mine. That erring woman is myself. Now curse me! kill me! I am ready to die."

He recoiled from her and dropped into his chair, completely overcome. His agony was as great as her own, and the greatest part of it was his deep pity for her misery; for he loved her, he loved her, and he knew beyond all peradventure that she loved him utterly.

There was a heavy silence between them, broken only by her deep convulsive sobs, that rent her husband's heart.

Oh, what a coming home was this! The serpent had

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entered their Eden, and its beauty and peace were devastated and destroyed.

At length she ventured an anxious, fearful glance at his face.

The love, pity, horror and utter misery of its expression shocked her out of all feeling for her own trouble. She could suffer, but she could not endure to see *him* suffer! And now, besides, she saw that in her wild, despairing self-accusation she had given him an impression of her fault, darker, deeper, fouler than the truth warranted. She must set that right at once; for oh! she could not rest for an instant under such a shameful ban, and she could not bear to see him suffer so!

She started from her chair and dropped at his feet, and clasped his knees.

"August! August! look at me!" she prayed, gazing up to him.

But though he did not repulse her, his hands covered his face.

"August! August! look at me!" she prayed, in anguish.

"Do not kneel to me, my lost love! I cannot bear to see you there, so low," he said; with sorrowful tenderness. "I have no reproaches for you, Musa. Heaven knows that I have only love and pity for you—though we must part to-night, Musa, and part—forever!"

"Oh, no, no, no! We must not part! I cannot leave you! It would break my heart!" she cried, wild with anguish.

"We must part, Musa, though our parting should break both our hearts—as it will!" he added, in a choking voice.

She sobbed aloud and clung to his knees, but found no voice to answer him.

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"Listen, Musa! My love, I shall love forever, notwithstanding all. Listen, I will do all that I can to help and shield you in this trial. I shall leave here to-night——" his voice broke down with emotion, and nothing but her heart-rending sobs were heard for a few moments, until he recovered himself and resumed.

"I shall leave this house to-night upon some plea of urgent necessity. 'Urgent necessity!' That will be a true plea. And you must remain here for the present, until I can devise some means of effecting a permanent separation, without publicity and without detriment to your name and fame."

"Oh, what do I care for my name and fame if I have not you," she wildly broke forth. "What do I care for my life or soul? I swear to you, August, that if I lose you, I will kill myself within the next hour. I will rush away and hurl myself from some precipice, or into some river, or across the track of some railway train! I swear it before high Heaven!"

"Oh, wild and reckless and ungovernable nature! How shall I deal with you?" said August, with a groan.

"Listen to me! Hear me! Hear before you judge! Oh, August, do not think worse of me than I deserve—than I could *ever* have deserved!" she cried, clinging to his knees, and dropping her beautiful, dishevelled head upon her clinging hands.

"Heaven knows that I wish to believe the best of you, Musa. No lips but your own should have dared to accuse you to me without rebuke. From no lips but your own would I have believed——"

His voice broke down again, and he covered his agonized face with his hands.

"But you have received a wrong impression from my

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words. You have, indeed, dearest. Oh, listen to me, August, before you act upon your fatal sentence of—separation!" she gasped, as if the last word had suffocated her.

"Then rise, Musa, and sit beside me. I tell you that I cannot endure to see you there, so low. It humiliates me, as well as yourself," he said, taking both her hands in both of his, and raising her to her feet.

She sat down beside him, and dropping her head upon his shoulder, whispered:

"August, will you listen to my story?"

"Yes, Musa."

"Will you believe it?"

"Yes, for I know you to be a truthful woman."

"Notwithstanding that I kept a fatal secret from you?"

"Notwithstanding that."

"Noble, faithful heart, I will speak to you as to Heaven. August, do you *know* that I love you?"

"Beyond all peradventure, I know that you love me. I have never doubted your love. I never shall doubt it, though we part."

"I doubt very much whether we shall part, my love, my king. I doubt it very much," murmured Musa, with tender gravity. "August, will you believe me when I tell you, when I swear to you, that I never loved until I met you, unless—unless the gentle affection I bore my friends could be called love?"

"You never loved any one before me?" echoed August, in a low voice.

"Heaven knows that I never did."

"Then how, oh, Heaven! how could you have fallen from the glory of your womanhood?" he groaned, in an almost inaudible voice.

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"I have not fallen," she answered, firmly. "You misinterpreted that wild confession. You did, indeed. I have not fallen, August; but oh! I have bitterly deceived and wronged you."

"I can scarcely understand you, Musa."

"I am going to make it clear. I am going to tell you the whole sad story. It seems so easy to do that *now*, which it seemed so difficult, so impossible to do before. August, the whole of my offense against you was this—in concealing from you the fact of my former marriage."

"YOUR FORMER MARRIAGE!" exclaimed Mr. Carew, nearly stupefied by this announcement.

"Yes, August. I had been a wife, and I was a mother and a widow when you married me."

"Musa, you astonish me by this intelligence. Yet I thank Heaven, from my soul I thank Heaven that this is so, rather than the terrible suspicion your own self-accusation aroused should be true. Now tell me all about it. Who was the man? Why did you marry him without love? And why was the marriage kept a secret from all the world as well as from me?" he inquired, as he settled himself to listen.

And then with her beautiful face hidden on his shoulder, and her shining, purple-black ringlets flowing over his bosom, she told him the whole of her sad story, with scrupulous exactness, from beginning to end; then said:

"And now, August, I have told you all, everything. I have not a secret from you in the world. Do you believe me?"

"From my soul I do. Heaven forbid that I should doubt you," he answered, earnestly.

"And oh, August, when I kept the secret of my former marriage from you, Heaven knows that I did it from the

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great love I bore you. I loved you so, oh, I loved you so! I wanted to be your wife, your own, and to be with you forever at *all* cost. I did not dare to tell you the secret of my former marriage, because I could not prove it, and I did not know how you would receive the news so unexpected. I feared to startle you, to repel you, to *lose* you, August. And oh! to have lost you would have been death, and worse than death to me! I did not dare to risk losing you by telling you my secret. I kept it from you to the last, August. But oh! none but the Searcher of All Hearts knows how terribly I have suffered in keeping that secret from you."

"I know it, my love, I know it. Ah! Musa, if you had but trusted my heart! I would have received your confidence then, as I receive it now. I would have believed your own account of your marriage, as I believe it now. And you, oh, my love, would have been spared so much of anguish," he said, as he tenderly caressed her.

"Yes, but I have deserved every pang that I have suffered. I sinned against you and against love. I was an infidel toward you and toward love. I could not trust you or love with my secret. And so that secret, like a poisoned arrow, has been rankling in my bosom all these months. And I deserved it all. I do not ask you to forgive me, my love, my king, because I feel that you have done so already."

"From the depths of my soul I have, dear wife," he earnestly answered, kissing her.

"Oh, the peace, the rest! Oh, the peace, the rest!" she said, with the sigh of an infinite relief, as her head dropped on his bosom.

"And now we will talk about your child. Young mother, you must have suffered cruelly, in leaving your child," he said, sympathetically.

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"Oh, I did, I did, August!"

"You shall suffer no more, my darling. Listen, Musa. I have a plan by which we can receive and acknowledge your child as our own, without exciting any gossip——"

"As '*our*' own? oh, August!" she said, with much emotion.

"Yes, dearest; for your child shall be my child."

"Oh, god-like soul! what can I do to merit all your wondrous love?"

"Trust me, Musa; dear wife, trust me. But now to my plan. We will make arrangements to go to Europe immediately. You and I are strong young people, Musa, and will not mind crossing the ocean in the dead of winter."

"Oh, no," she said, willing and anxious to agree to everything he might propose and eager to hear his plan.

"We will take our child with us, when we go. She is about a year old, I think you said?"

"A little over a year old."

"Well, we will take her to Europe with us. We will remain abroad two or three years. And when we bring her back with us, who will question that she is not *our* own?"

"Oh, August, August, would you indeed do all that for me? for me, so weak and so unworthy?" she murmured, in a voice full of emotion.

"I would do anything to ensure your happiness, dear wife, for I love and trust you—you who are neither weak nor unworthy," he answered, caressing her.

"Oh, this, indeed, is love! This is love, such as I never even dreamed of! This is love without self-love! How shall I ever deserve it?" she said, clasping her hands together.

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"By loving and trusting me, dear wife."

"I will love and trust you, utterly and forever. Ah, August, I realize now the words of the Lord: 'To whom much is forgiven, the same loveth much.' Oh, the great relief! August!"

"Well, my own?"

"Do you know that I was threatened with exposure? As I sat down in the carriage that was to take us to the steamboat, I picked up a letter directed to myself. I wish I had it now to show you, but I have not. In my terror I burned it up. But it threatened me cruelly. It told me that Nemesis should meet me at Richmond."

"Well, my darling, Nemesis, invoked by an enemy, has appeared and vanished. Instead of being an avenging spirit, she has been converted by love into a delivering angel. For all things are possible to love," replied August.

"Yes, I know now that love is the strongest power—strong enough to put the hosts of Satan to flight. Certainly strong enough to paralyze the malignant power of mine enemy. Mine enemy! August, who is mine enemy? Who sent that letter to you, or put it into your hands?"

"Armida Sutton," gravely replied Mr. Carew.

"Armida Sutton!" exclaimed Musa, in amazement—"my foster-sister! the poor girl that I took from the barren Montgomery farm and made my most cherished companion! When and where did she do this? Tell me all about it, August."

Mr. Carew commenced and told his wife all the details of the visit paid him by her false and treacherous friend.

"I used sometimes to think she envied me; but I never dreamed she hated me to such a great extent. She must have been a very artful and vigilant spy upon me to have

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discovered all she knows. And that letter, which I missed, she must have picked up in my room," said Musa, who never imagined that Armida Sutton, with all her treachery, would have descended to commit a felony by breaking open drawers and caskets to possess herself of forbidden secrets.

"And now, dearest wife, let us forget Miss Sutton and all connected with her. Now that you are under your husband's protection, her malice is powerless to hurt you," said Mr. Carew.

"Yes, we will forget her. And that means we will forgive her. Oh, August, my heart is so full of gratitude and love, that it has no room for any other passion. Oh, I thank Heaven for this great deliverance. Oh, the rest and peace. Oh, the perfect rest and the infinite peace."

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CHAPTER XIX.

A DREADFUL SHOCK.

THE next morning Musa wrote to Mrs. Seaforth, informing that good woman of her marriage with Mr. Francis August Carew, and advising her of their intention to go in a few days to Inwood, to reclaim the child Musette.

Musa was very happy now! Never, in all her young life, had she experienced, or even imagined, such happiness as she now possessed.

Her deliverance from the heavy burden of her secret; the great proof she had received of her worshipped husband's boundless love and faith; the near prospect of reunion with her dear child; the certain protection and security of her own fair fame—all these combined to make her present, in contrast to her past, like Heaven after purgatory.

She agreed with her husband's opinion, that they had best make all their arrangements for the voyage to Europe, before going to New York to claim the child, so that there should be no necessity for their return to Richmond, previous to their embarkation for Liverpool.

With this understanding, the husband and wife vigorously set about making their preparations for going abroad.

Musa wrote to Mr. Lyttleton Locke and to Mrs. Shrewsbury, advising them of the proposed voyage, and placing her house on Vermont Avenue in their charge.

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Mr. Carew put all his affairs in the hands of a competent agent, who was to attend to them during his absence.

In one week from the time of their first arrival at home all their arrangements were completed, and they were to leave Richmond for New York the next morning.

That last evening they were sitting together before the comfortable coal fire in their drawing-room, when the messenger came from the post-office, bringing in the mail-bag.

Mr. Carew opened it, and took out and divided the letters. There were half a dozen business letters for himself, which he laid on the table, to be read and turned over to his agent.

And there were three for Musa—one from Mr. Locke, one from Mrs. Shrewsbury, and one from Maggie Seaforth. Musa eagerly seized the latter.

"It is from Mrs. Seaforth," she said, with a smile of delight, "and it tells me of my child."

He smiled in sympathy with her, as he began to open his own letters.

But as she read her cheeks paled, her eyes fixed with an intense gaze upon the lines she perused, and her hand trembled in turning the page. At length, with a low cry of anguish, she dropped the letter, and fell back in her chair.

August sprang to her side.

"Musa, my darling, what is it?" he exclaimed, taking her hand and bending anxiously over her.

"Oh, my child! my child! Oh, my child! my child!" she wailed, in despair.

"Sick? Dead? Tell me, my darling?" he murmured.

"Oh, worse! worse! Read! read!" she groaned, point-

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ing to the fallen letter, and breaking into a sudden storm of sobs and tears.

But he could not read while she was in that condition.

He stood by her, gently caressing her, until the violence of her emotion had subsided, and left her weak as an infant. Then he brought her a glass of wine, and persuaded her to drink it.

"Now, my dearest, can you tell me what this means?" he inquired, as he took the empty glass and set it down.

"Oh, read! read! I cannot tell you," she gasped, for she was still half-breathless, and sobbing faintly at short intervals.

August picked up the letter, and, smoothing out its crumpled folds, read as follows:

THE BROWN COTTAGE, INWOOD, Jan. 15th, 18—.

MY DEAR MRS. CAREW: Oh, my dear ma'am, I don't know what you'll think of me, or think of us all. So many troubles I don't know which to tell you about first. But, as the pious Mr. Wilks says, "tribulations abound all over the world."

First, I must tell you, ma'am, that I am married to Mr. Wilks, which will surprise you very much, because I never expected to be married the third time, any more than you did, ma'am, who used to say you never would.

The very day after we were married, my boy, Sam, ran away, and went to sea. He said, "he could n't stand so many step-fathers." And I only gave him one at a time, ma'am. And I am sure his first step-father, my poor, dear Jack Seaforth, who was killed in the fight with the pirate, was as good to him as ever his own father could have been.

And talking of his own father, ma'am, reminds me how surprised I was when I see your new name. It is Carew, which my first husband's name was—Harold Carew, though we always called him Harry, or Hal. And Sam was his son, though people got to calling him Sam Seaforth, instead of Sam Carew, because my name, by my second marriage, being Seaforth, it came more natural.

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No wonder my Sam ran away to sea. Running away to sea runs in the family, I think, ma'am.

Sam's own father, Harold Carew, ran away to sea, ma'am, though he had good cause, having been very badly treated by *his* father, which his name was Colonel Harold Carew, the same name as your husband's, ma'am. And if you also were any way related to your husband's family, that would account for the great likeness there is between my boy Sam and yourself. And I know folks down South often marry their kinfolks to keep all the land in the same family, because my poor dear Hal used to tell me so.

Oh, dear ma'am, your letter came to me in the middle of my trouble about Sam. But that was nothing to what followed.

When I got your letter telling me you were married to Mr. Carew, and were coming to take the child home, I felt very sorry indeed at the idea of parting from the little darling.

And so did Mr. Wilks, who loves her as if she was his own, and calls her his little dove-eyed darling, and wants to make her a lamb of the fold.

But when Mary Morris heard about it, she was the wildest thing that ever I saw. She had a regular bad fit of hystericks. And even when that was over, she sobbed and cried, and cried and sobbed, day in and day out, without eating a mouthful of victuals, or letting the child out of her arms one single minute.

She said she wished somebody would take and cut off her head, and put her out of her misery, before ever the time should come for her to part from the baby that she had nursed at her own breast by day, and cuddled to her own heart at night, and ever so many crazy things like that, she said, so that I ought to have been warned against what happened, only you see, ma'am, I didn't suspect.

On Monday morning, Mary said to me:

"When do you expect this fine lady to come and tear my baby away from my bosom?"

"On Thursday," I said. "And I shall be glad when all this fuss is over."

No more was said between us then.

Mary went away sobbing and crying and begging somebody to cut her head off and put her out of her misery, in her usual crazy way.

And still, ma'am, I didn't expect anything wrong or dangerous.

But on Tuesday morning, ma'am, Mary didn't make her appear-

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ance. I thought she had cried all night and was making up for it by sleeping late in the morning. So I didn't begin to get uneasy till the morning was half over. And then I thought she had cried herself sick, and that the baby must want attention.

So I went to her room, and it was empty, and the drawers were empty, and the wardrobes were empty. And Mary was gone, and the baby was gone, and everything was gone. And on the dressing-table there was a note written to you, ma'am, which I will send you in this letter.

Oh, I screamed and screamed, until Mr. Wilks came running up to ask me what was the matter.

I told him all about what had happened, as well as I could for crying.

He said that the police must be notified. And he put on his hat and ran down to the platform at the foot of the hill, and waited and jumped on the first train for New York.

And he informed the police. And spent the whole day there searching for Mary and the child, but did not then get so much as the least clue to either of them.

So he came home at night, but brought me no satisfaction. He says, dear ma'am, that the woman seems to have baffled pursuit and to have got clear off with the child.

She had a plenty of money, because you paid her such good wages and made her so many presents, that she was able to save a great deal to run away with.

Mr. Wilks has gone to New York again to resume his search, but left me orders to be sure to write to you to-day, and tell you of this misfortune, which I had rather died than met with.

I send you the letter Mary Morris left. It was not sealed, so we took the liberty of reading it to see if it would give us any clue to her whereabouts. But it didn't.

Hoping and trusting and praying that we may soon find the woman and the child,

I remain, dear ma'am, respectfully yours,

MARGARET WILKS.

August read this letter very hastily, as Musa had read it,—skimming over, or skipping altogether, the long preamble, with which poor Maggie had tried to put off as long

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as possible the evil moment of telling the dreadful news. But when he got to the story of the child's abduction by the nurse, he read it with the most careful attention.

Then he picked up and examined the inclosed note that had been written by Mary Morris.

It was badly spelled, worse written, blotted with tears, and as follows:

BROWN COTTIDGE, Mundy nite.

MADDAM: I can't part with the baby that I have nursed at my breast ever sense she was borne. It would kill me *dead* to do it. You promussed when you took her you would take me too, so I should nevver be parted from her. But now you are a going to brake your prommus and take her away from me. You wrote to Mrs. Seaforth as I had better look out for another place, as it would not be kunveenyunt for you to take me to Urope with you. And how you would pay me handsome to make it up to me for the disopintmint. Jest as if money could make up to me for the baby as I have slept with in my buzzum all her life. If you had kep your word to me, and took me along of the baby, I would a served you faithful for the baby's sake, and kep your secret too; for I ain't a foole, and I expect as there *is* a secret. But no, you wouldent trust me—you wouldent keep your word with me—you wanted to cut loose from evveryboddy as knowed ennything about the baby.

And so I can't part with the baby, I tell you. It is all I have got in the world to love, except my poor Dick, and Lord noes where he is.

But I rite this letter out of pitty for you, who had no pitty for me, to let you noe, as the child will be as well took care of as ever she was. I love her better than my own hart's blood, and I would work my fingers to the bones for her, and go hungry and cold before she should want ennything as she has evver been used to.

I love her a hunded thousin times better than you do, cause I nevver could a gone and left her and stade away from her like you did.

It won't be enny use, your trying to find me and the child, cause you can't do it, Maddam. But you can cumfut yourself by thinkin' as the child will be as well took care of as evver she was. For so she will be as true as I tell you. Yours rispectfully,

MARY MORRIS.

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August read this letter, folded it up with the first one, put both in his pocket, and paused reflectively.

"Well, I have heard of children being stolen for spite, for profit, and for revenge; but I never before heard of a child being stolen for love," he mused.

Then turning to his sobbing wife, he said:

"My darling, I think you may take comfort. This woman who has carried off your child, for love of it, will certainly take good care of it, as long as she keeps it. But she cannot keep it from us many days, no, nor many hours after our arrival at New York. She is evidently a simple-minded creature, and, unaided as she is, and hampered with the stolen child, she will not be able to elude the police for twenty-four hours. And now," said Mr. Carew, speaking from some natural curiosity, as well as from his wish to divert his wife's thoughts from the subject of her child, "what is this that the woman writes about her first husband. He appears to have been the absconding son of old Colonel Carew, of Pirate's Peak?"

"The '*absconding*' son!" exclaimed Musa, indignantly —"the *discarded* son, you mean, dear, if you know anything about it. Colonel Carew treated his boy shamefully, shamefully, and literally drove him from the house—the poor, motherless lad. If it had not been for that, I should like Colonel Carew very much; but as it is, whenever I think of his treatment of his son, I find it difficult to be civil to him, even in my own house."

"You shock me, Musa. Who told you this?"

"Half a dozen or more of the neighbors down on the bay side."

"What was the cause of his ill-treatment of the boy?"

"His own overbearing disposition and ungovernable temper."

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"And do you suppose that the first husband of this many-times-married young woman was really Harold Carew?"

"I don't know, August, dear. I hardly read that part of the letter. I skipped away down to where it told of my child. Read that part over again, please."

Mr. Carew drew the letter from his pocket, opened it, turned to the page that treated of the writer's first husband, found the paragraph, and read:

"'How surprised I was when I see your new name. It is Carew, which my first husband's name was Harold Carew. * * * No wonder my Sam run away to sea. Running away to sea runs in that family. Sam's own father ran away to sea, though *he* had good cause, having been very badly treated by his father, which his name was Colonel Harold Carew, the same name as your husband's, ma'am.'

"There, dear, that is all she says about the name, though I think it is conclusive evidence that the discarded son of Colonel Carew was her husband and the father of her little vagrant Sam. What ever became of this unlucky Harold Carew? Do you know?"

"Yes, he was drowned at sea. That is all I ever knew of my landlady's first husband. Singularly enough, I never heard his name until I got this letter. And as for Sam, he was always called Sam Seaforth. So you see, in the fifteen months that I knew this woman, I never chanced to hear the name of Harold Carew."

"And what a thin paper wall there was between you all this time. And this young vagrant who has run away to sea is really the grandson and heir of 'Old Harry?'"

"Of course he must be so."

"Well, my darling, when we go to New York to look after our own child, whom I feel sure we shall speedily re-

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cover unharmed, we must also try to find this runaway lad and bring him to the knowledge of his grandfather, for surely 'the Old Harry' himself will not refuse to receive and educate his only son's orphan boy."

"I don't know. He *is* 'the Old Harry,' you know. He richly deserves the name and acts out the character. He may refuse to see the lad."

"In that case we will take him ourselves, dear. He is our little cousin and bears our name. He is a Carew. We will rear and educate him."

Musa looked at him with more of admiration and honor than she could venture to express.

"How is it," she thought, "that I, who feel so unworthy, should be blessed with the love and trust of such a man? His every thought and word and deed are so noble!"

It was now growing late. And as they were to set out very early the next morning for their journey northward, they retired to get what rest they could.

They travelled by the quickest route that was then practicable, and reached Inwood late on the evening of the second day.

As the train "slowed" up to the little way-station, and Musa caught sight of the Brown Cottage on the hill, half hidden even in mid-winter by the evergreens, her heart almost ceased to beat in the intensity of her anxiety.

She felt that in a very few moments she should know whether her child was there, ready to be clasped to her bosom, or whether it was still missing.

When the train stopped, Mr. Carew carefully helped her out of the car, gave his servant a check to receive their baggage, and then drew her arm within his own, to help her in walking up the hill to the house.

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"Courage! courage, my love! You are nearly sinking. Keep up your heart; for if we do not find her here, it is but a question of little time. We shall find her to-morrow or the next day. That simple woman can never hide long from our vigilant search," whispered August, as they reached the top of the hill and went up to the cottage.

August rang the bell, while Musa sank, half fainting, on the seat in the little rustic porch.

The door was opened immediately by Maggie Seaforth, or rather Mrs. Wilks herself.

"*My child?*" gasped Musa, and she could utter no more.

"*Oh, ma'am!*" wailed Maggie Wilks, and *she* could say no more.

"Come in, sir," said the parson, appearing on the scene and addressing them. "Pray come in, madam! This is a most unfortunate affair. And I regret to say that, as yet, we have not succeeded in gaining any clue to the woman or the child. The police, however, are on the watch, and we hope for better success to-morrow."

August gently seated Musa in a large easy-chair, stooped and whispered to her to keep up her spirits, for that he would find her child, and then he stood up and inquired:

"When is there a train to New York?"

"There will be a train in fifteen minutes, sir," Mr. Wilks answered.

"Then I shall go down by it."

"Oh, where are you going, August?" inquired Musa, in a faint voice; for in her miserable state of mind, she hated to lose sight of him for an instant.

"I am going down to New York, my dear, to get advertisements, offering a large reward for the recovery of the child, inserted in all the morning papers. I shall return

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to-night if I can get a train. When is the latest train up to-night?" he inquired, turning to Mr. Wilks.

"There is one stops here at eleven twelve, sir."

"That will do, I shall return by that. And, now I must be quick, as I have only ten minutes left. Give me a personal description of the woman. *You*, Mr. Wilks, if you please. My wife is not capable of exertion at this moment," said Mr. Carew, taking out his tablets and preparing to write, and take notes for the advertisement.

"Mary Morris—short in stature, plump in form, full face, fair complexion, red cheeks, blue eyes, yellow hair, very soft smile, very low voice," said the parson.

"That will do for the woman. Now for the child," said Mr. Carew, writing rapidly.

"Musette—thirteen months old, large for her age; round and plump in form, round plump face, small regular features, rich dark complexion, crimson cheeks and lips, deep dark-brown eyes, very earnest and wistful in expression; dark eye-brows; dark, silky, short curling hair."

"That will do for the child. What had they on when they left?" inquired Mr. Carew, as his pencil flew over the tablet.

"We cannot tell. They had such an extensive wardrobe, and the woman managed to get it all away during the night."

"Then this will have to do. Time is up. Good-night, my love. You had better go to bed. Mrs. Wilks, pray see to my wife. She needs attention. Good-night, dear. I shall offer a thousand dollars reward for the recovery of the child," said Mr. Carew, as he hastily pressed the hand of his wife, and hurried away to catch the train, whose warning whistle was even then sounding.

Mr. Wilks politely ran after him to see him safely off.

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"Oh, Maggie!" said Musa, as soon as the two women were left alone, "where do you think that woman can be? Where has she taken my poor, dear, little child?"

"Dear ma'am, I would 'most give the ears off my head to know myself, but I don't," replied the weeping woman.

"Does Mr. Wilks think we can find her?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am; he says we will be sure to find her, sooner or later."

"Oh, Maggie, do you think that woman will be good to my poor little Musette?"

"Good to her, ma'am? Why, she would take the heart out of her bosom and give it to the child, if the child needed it. The way she do love that child, ma'am, is beyond belief; it is, indeed."

"I am rightly punished for delegating my maternal duty and privilege to any other woman. The nurse loves the child with a mother's love——"

"That she does, ma'am," interrupted Maggie.

"And no doubt the child loves the nurse as if the nurse were her mother," sighed Musa.

"She does that, ma'am. She dotes on Mollie Morris," assented Maggie Wilks, with cruel candor.

At this moment Mr. Wilks returned from seeing Mr. Carew off on the train for New York.

Perceiving that Musa still sat with her bonnet and wrappings on, he turned to his wife and said:

"Margaret, had you not better show this lady to her room, where she can lay off her wraps, and order tea?"

"Oh, yes, I had indeed! Trouble makes me forget everything. But, Mr. Wilks, he is so thoughtful. Come, ma'am. Your room is all ready for you. The same room. And the supper will be on the table by the time you are ready for it," said Maggie, leading the way up-stairs to the

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pretty chamber over the parlor that had always been kept sacred to the use of the real mistress of the house.

But as soon as Musa entered this room, so filled with memories and associations connected with her lost child, all her remaining firmness gave way, and she threw herself upon the bed in a paroxysm of hysterical grief.

Her poor friend sought to soothe her with words of hope and confidence, but without effect.

"Go away, Maggie," she said, through her heavy sobs. "Go, go! leave me to myself, to wrestle with this trouble as I may. I shall get better sooner if left alone. Go."

Maggie went, sorrowfully enough, and she did the next best thing she knew how to do. She prepared the nice cream toast and the fine orange Pekoe tea that she knew Musa could enjoy when she could take nothing else.

An hour passed away before Musa came down-stairs again. She was now more composed in manner than she had been since her entrance into the house.

After supper, Mr. and Mrs. Wilks and Musa sat up in the parlor to wait for Mr. Carew, who returned a little while after midnight.

He had made the round of the daily newspaper offices, and had the advertisement for the absconding woman and abducted child, giving a full personal description of each, and offering a large reward for their discovery, inserted in them all.

And his hopes of a successful issue were so sanguine as to cheer the spirits of the sorrowing mother.

Early the next morning Mr. Carew, accompanied by Mr. Wilks, went again to the city, to see the chief of police, and consult with that experienced officer as to the next best steps to be taken for the recovery of the lost child.

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Musa remained at the cottage with her humble friend Maggie.

She sat in her own room for the greater part of the day, and Maggie sat with her.

Inspired by the confidence of her husband and of the minister, who were both convinced that they should soon recover the child, Musa felt in better spirits than on the preceding day.

As she sat with Mrs. Wilks, suddenly pity for that patient woman moved her heart.

"My poor Maggie," she said, "how selfish I have been to think only of my own child, when your boy is also gone. Have you heard any news of him at all?"

"Yes, dear ma'am, I have; but the news came too late for me to bring him back. He shipped as cabin-boy aboard the *Banshee*, merchant ship, bound from New York to Liverpool. I got the news the day after the *Banshee* sailed. So it was too late to do any good."

"Well now, Maggie, I want to talk to you about your son and his father. You wrote to me that his father's name was Harold Carew."

"Yes, ma'am, and he was the only son of a horrid, awful, domineering old Turk, down South somewhere, who wasn't contented with abusing his own poor slaves, but abused his own only son to that extent as to drive him away from home."

"Yes, I know all about that. But do you know, or do you remember that your boy's father was a gentleman, and that your boy himself is the heir to one of the finest bay-side estates in Maryland?"

"Yes, I know, but what good is that, dear ma'am? That horrid old wretch—Lord forgive me for using profane language—cast off his son, and it an't likely that he

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will even so much as look at his grandson," said Maggie, drying her eyes with her white muslin apron.

"I differ with you. Colonel Carew, I have heard, regretted his extreme harshness to his only son when it was too late. And he would gladly have recalled him to his home. He did advertise for his son, but his advertisement was never answered. And I think that when he hears that his son left a son, he will be ready to welcome the boy with gladness. But you must be ready with the proofs of your marriage with Harold Carew, and of your child's birth."

"Oh, I can be ready enough with all them. But it will be no good, ma'am; not a bit," sighed Maggie, despairingly.

"Would you object to letting me see these proofs?"

"Oh, no, ma'am; not a bit," said Maggie, as she arose and passed into the next room, from which she presently returned, bringing a handsome japanned box, which she placed upon her lap, after she had resumed her seat.

"My poor Hal brought this for me from China, ma'am. It 's very valuable, I believe, and many is the time I could have sold it for a good sum. But I never would. I kept it through all the days of my poverty, and kept all my treasures in it," she said, as she unlocked the box, and displayed its contents.

They consisted principally of letters and papers. But on top was a morocco case, which Maggie took out and opened. It contained double miniatures.

"Here, ma'am, is a true likeness of my poor Hal, and one of his own mother. Look at them," said Maggie, putting the case in the hands of the lady.

"This is very good proof of Sam's parentage at least, for there is a very strong likeness between Sam himself

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and this portrait of his father. Colonel Carew will be sure to know the boy by that likeness."

"The other miniature is my poor Hal's mother, ma'am."

"Colonel Carew's first wife? Yes, a pretty blonde; not at all like son or grandson," said Musa, studying the picture.

"And here, ma'am, are my marriage lines, which anybody may see the same recorded in the register of St. Paul's Church in the city. And all these letters, ma'am, are the letters which my poor Hal wrote to me before marriage and afterward," said Maggie, placing a large packet of papers in the hands of her friend.

"Yes, these are valuable. They must all be submitted to Colonel Carew," answered Musa, as she received them.

"This, dear ma'am, is my first wedding-ring. See what a thick, heavy gold ring it is. And on the inside, you can see for yourself, is engraved, 'Harold and Margaret Carew.'"

"Yes, this is also very valuable, I should think," said Musa, as she examined the ring.

"This, ma'am, is a daguerreotype of me and Sam and my poor Hal taken together. And a time we had getting that baby to sit still long enough to be took," said Maggie, handing an old-fashioned case and picture, containing very good likenesses of the parents and child well grouped.

"This is excellent, Maggie. This also must be shown to Colonel Carew. I think your proofs are abundantly sufficient to establish the position of your son as the grandson of Colonel Harold Carew, and the heir of Pirate's Peak," said Musa, as she added the old-fashioned daguerreotype to the other "documents."

"And this—oh, dear me!—this *is* a curiosity!" said

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Maggie, as she produced another paper from the box, whose contents were not yet half exhausted.

"What is it? Another proof?" inquired Musa, without looking up from the picture that she was still engaged in studying.

"Oh, dear me, no, ma'am. It has got nothing to do with me nor Sam. Look at it, ma'am," said Maggie, handing the paper to the lady.

Musa took it carelessly, opened it, and uttered a cry of joy.

IT WAS HER MISSING MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE!

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CHAPTER XX.

THE MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE—A FALSE TRAIL—THE MYSTERY AT RAVEN ROCKS.

"WHAT in the world is the matter, dear ma'am?" exclaimed Maggie Seaforth, in amazement, as she gazed at the lady, who, after that first sharp cry, sat staring at the paper in her hands.

"Where did you get this document, Mrs. Wilks?" almost breathlessly inquired Musa.

"I got it out of my poor dear Jack's vest pocket."

"'Jack's vest pocket!'" echoed Musa, in perplexity.

"Yes, ma'am, Jack's vest pocket. When my poor, dear Jack was killed in the fight with the pirates, one of his messmates brought home his chest to me. And in it I found a second-hand suit of gentleman's clothes, which my poor, dear Jack must have bought in London, for his own Sunday's best. Only he never lived to wear it."

"Could you let me see that suit?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, certainly."

Maggie arose and went out, and when she returned she laid the required articles before the lady.

Musa took them up tenderly, piece by piece, and tried to recognize them. But by no effort of the imagination could she do so.

She knew from circumstantial evidence that this was the wedding-dress of the Earl of Cressy, and that the right-hand pocket of the vest was the very pocket into which

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she had seen him thrust that paper handed by the minister, and which had been subsequently found there, and which turned out to be the missing marriage certificate.

"Maggie," she said, "I will give you a hundred dollars for this suit; they belonged to one who was once very dear to me."

"And may be you knew the lady and gentleman whose marriage lines was in the vest pocket of the suit?"

"Yes, I knew them both very intimately. And therefore, Maggie, I would like to keep the 'lines,' as you call them."

"Oh, yes, certainly, ma'am, keep 'em if you want 'em. They are no use to me. Let me fold the clothes up for you, ma'am."

As she folded them, Musa started and changed color, for suddenly she remembered her forgotten dream, in which she had been painfully hunting through New York, this very garment, and had seen it in the hands of this very woman, as she now saw it.

"*Can* such things be!
And overcome us, like a summer cloud,
Without our special wonder?"

she said to herself, as she fell into deep reverie.

But her joy at the recovery of her marriage certificate soon put all speculative thoughts to flight.

Left alone, Musa read over her marriage certificate and reflected upon the strange chain of circumstances that had eventually restored it to her possession.

She was now doubly anxious for the speedy return of Mr. Carew from the city, for she was not only longing to receive news of her child, but to put in his hands this proof of her former marriage.

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Truly, he had taken her own word for it; he had trusted her utterly; but she did not rejoice the less in this opportunity of justifying his trust.

To her impatience, the day passed slowly.

At length, at ten o'clock in the evening, Mr. Carew and Mr. Wilks arrived. Musa flew to receive them, and learn news of her missing child. Mr. Carew gave her that news before she had time to ask it.

"We have a clue to the woman and child at last, my dearest. A woman and child answering exactly to the description of the missing ones took the morning train, yesterday, from Jersey City to Washington. I started off a detective by this night's train, to track them. And if you feel equal to the journey, we will ourselves go on in the morning."

"Oh, I thank Heaven! Yes, yes! we will go on to-morrow morning! I would go to-night—this hour—if it were possible!" eagerly exclaimed Musa, as she led the way from the front passage into the little drawing-room.

"I should have taken you on to-night, my dearest, if it had been possible to do so, after getting this clue to the child. But, you see, I had barely time to hurry off a detective, who was very near missing the train, after all. And there is no other for Washington until to-morrow," explained Mr. Carew, as he sat down.

Musa was eager to show her marriage certificate to Mr. Carew. So, pleading fatigue and the necessity of rising early the next morning, in order to reach the Washington train in time, Musa bade her friends good-night, and retired to her room, whither she was soon followed by Mr. Carew.

"August, you trusted me without proof. And now I am very glad to give you the proof that will justify your

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trust. Read that, dear August," she said, with much emotion, as she placed the marriage certificate in his hand.

"Why, what is this?" he inquired, as he unfolded the paper.

"Read it, August, and you will see," she answered.

He turned to the top of the page, and read as follows:

CERTIFICATE OF MARRIAGE.

This is to certify,
That on the Third Day of February,
In the Year of Our Lord,
One Thousand Eight Hundred and ——,
In Bladensburg, in Prince George's County,
In the Diocese of Maryland,
I Joined Together in Holy Matrimony,
Donald Hugh, Earl of Cressy,
And Musadora Percie,
According to the Rites of the Protestant Episcopal
Church in the United States of America,
And in Conformity with the Laws
Of the State of Maryland.
In Testimony Whereof, I Herewith Put My Name,
This Third Day of February, Anno Domini,
One Thousand Eight Hundred and ——.

DEMETRIUS MORTIMER, D. D.

"Did you think it necessary to show me this, my love?" inquired August Carew, half reproachfully.

"No, no; but, oh! I am so glad to have it to show you," answered Musa, with a sigh of relief.

"You found this, probably, in some of your effects left here, in some box or casket where you had put it away safely and forgotten it?" said Mr. Carew.

"No, on the contrary, Maggie found it nearly a year ago, under the pocket, between the lining and the cloth of

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a second-handed vest, bought by her husband in London, and no doubt first sold by the valet of the late Earl, as his perquisites."

"A very strange recovery of a lost document. Did Mrs. Wilks know to whom it belonged?"

"No. If she had even suspected she would have put it in my hands long ago. But as it was she kept it in a box among her own papers, and only found it by accident this morning while she was collecting all the letters and papers relating to her own first marriage with young Harold Carew, and to the birth and baptism of their son Samuel, with a view to establish his claims upon his grandfather, old Colonel Carew of Pirate's Peak."

"Does she *now* know?"

"She does not. She only knows that the document concerned some one in whom I felt interested."

"Then, my dear Musa, I would leave her in that ignorance, at least for the present. And now what do you wish to do about this marriage certificate?"

"I have not thought of doing anything. I was delighted to have it for your satisfaction. That is all."

"For my satisfaction! I was satisfied before I saw it."

"Well, then, to justify your faith in me."

"My faith in you needed no justification, Musa. So you do not think of using this certificate?"

"No, unless you wish me to do so. If I had recovered this paper a few months ago, I should have used it to prove my right to be recognized as the widow of the Earl of Cressy. But now that I am your wife, August, I am perfectly contented," earnestly answered Musa.

"But your child, Musa?"

"If my child had been a boy—the heir of the Dukedom of Montcalla—it would have been my duty to establish my

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former marriage for the security of that child's rights; but as she is a girl, and heiress to nothing whatever on her father's side, and could gain nothing from them but an empty title of courtesy, and as you have promised to adopt her for your own, I do not feel inclined to create a sensation by proclaiming my former marriage. Oh, August!" she suddenly exclaimed, breaking from the calmness of her former discourse, "I cannot bear the *thought* of my former marriage, much less the *talk* of it. Oh, August! I never loved the Earl of Cressy, though I thought I did when I consented to be his wife. But then I did not really know what love was. I mistook the mild affection I bore him for love. I never loved until I met you, August. I never even knew what love is till I loved you. Oh, August, do you believe me?"

"From my soul I believe you, dearest Musa."

"Then, in mercy, let me forget that I ever was married before. I am not like my little friend Maggie, who talks of her 'poor Hal,' and 'poor Jack,' and will some day speak of the Reverend Mr. Wilks as her 'poor Jerry.' I have loved but once. I can love but once. And I hate the self-deception that made me mistake a simple friendship for divine love. Then let me forget the past."

"You speak my own sentiments, dear Musa. By all means, let us forget the past. You might show your marriage certificate to your old friend Mr. Locke, and to the few others that were in your confidence, but to no more."

"Let us settle it upon that, then," said Musa.

Very early the next morning they arose, in order to catch the first train from Jersey City to Washington.

With delays at Amboy, and delays at Philadelphia, and at Havre de Grace, and at Baltimore, the journey between New York and Washington, that is effected in six hours

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now, took twelve then. So it was late in the evening when the train ran in to Washington station.

The detective, who had been sent on the night before, met them by appointment at the depot.

"What news?" eagerly inquired Mr. Carew, as they all stood upon the platform.

"Nothing satisfactory, I am sorry to say, sir. The woman and child, answering to the description of the missing ones, who left New York yesterday morning, arrived here last evening, and were seen to get off the train. But that is the last news I have been able to hear of them. All trace of them was lost in the crowd that got out at the depot. I have spent the day in a vain search for them, sir; but still I feel quite confident of finding them, for I have taken such precautions that they cannot leave the city, or attempt to leave it, without being arrested."

Mr. Ferret, the detective, did find the woman and child; but the woman wasn't Mary Morris, nor was the child Musette. The detective had been following a false trail. Musa would have been crushed by the terrible disappointment had it not been for August's inspiring hopefulness and energy. He at once made comprehensive arrangements for continuing the search, which Mr. Ferret undertook to prosecute to a definite issue. The trip to Europe was of course abandoned; and August and Musa concluded to go to Raven Rocks, and there await the result of Mr. Ferret's efforts to find the missing child.

The journey to Raven Rocks, which had to be made by stage, would have been insupportable to Musa (considering the inclement season of the year) under ordinary circumstances. But now it was a relief to her surcharged heart. Its novelties and hardships diverted her mind from the dis-

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appointments she had experienced, and gave a zest to the journey which she had by no means anticipated.

When they reached Eyrie, at the head of Bald Eagle Mountain, their trip by the stage ended, and the rest of the journey had to be made by private conveyance, which August requested the landlord of the Raven Rocks Inn to have in readiness for them—and also a wagon for their baggage, and their servants, Cassy and Cornwallis—immediately after breakfast.

On hearing what their destination was, Mr. Mosely, the landlord, indulged in a copious flow of gossip with regard to the old manor house. He said it was haunted by the ghost of an old servant, named Agatha, who was believed to have been murdered there several years before. He professed to have himself seen sights and heard sounds at the old house which froze his blood and made his hair stand on end. And when they reached the residence of Mr. Bullock, the land-steward, at the foot of the mountain, that gentleman corroborated the statements of the landlord, and ended by saying:

"I do not believe in any supernatural cause for these disturbances on the one hand, nor can I conjecture any natural cause for them on the other. The affair up to this hour remains enveloped in mystery."

"It shall be my business to clear up the mystery," said Mr. Carew, decisively.

"Heaven grant that you may do so, sir!"

"And now, if you please, Mr. Bullock, I will trouble you for the keys."

"Certainly, sir," said the land-steward, as he arose and went to a desk in the corner of the room, and took from it a heavy bunch of keys, which he brought to the young master of the house.

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"You are making a visit of inspection, sir, or possibly you are intending to make some stay among us?" respectfully inquired the land-steward.

"I have come down to look at the place, and may stay some weeks, more or less."

"If you would like to look over my accounts, sir, I will take them down to the house at any time you may choose to name."

"Very well, Mr. Bullock; I will send for you in good season—as soon as I have leisure to go over the books with you. Good-morning," said Mr. Carew, as he arose, and with the bunch of keys in his hand left the house and re-entered his carriage.

Their way now lay through the deep forest that filled the bottom of the valley and swept around the old hall. At length they emerged from the forest upon the road that ran along the stone wall enclosing the once cultivated but now neglected grounds around the manor house.

Then Musa came in sight of her future home—a massive gray stone building, with a pillared portico in front, and long wings to the right and left, with a gloomy background of tall cedars and rocky precipices.

The carriage drew up at a rusty iron gate, flanked by a porter's lodge, now tenantless.

Cornwallis alighted from his wagon, as nimbly as age and infirmity would permit, and hastened to throw open the gates.

The carriage rolled through, and entered upon a grass-grown and leaf-strewn avenue bordered by evergreen trees, and leading by a semicircular curve through the lawn and up to the house.

"Where shall we find the old negro who is in charge of

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the premises, I wonder," said Musa, as the carriage drew up before the pillared portico.

"Bullock told me that his cottage is in the rear of the manor house, near the stables," answered Mr. Carew, as he alighted.

Musa prepared to follow him.

"Welcome home, my dearest love," he said, as he handed her from the carriage and led her up the stone steps to the door.

He selected a key from the heavy bunch in his hand, put it in the lock and turned it. The harsh grating sound with which it worked told a dismal tale of long disuse.

He threw open the wide door and entered the front hall. But the fixed air that met him beyond the threshold sent him hurrying back to stop Musa.

"You must not enter yet, my love. The place is deadly. Sit you here upon the porch until we open the house and let the sunlight and air in upon it," he said, as he hurried to the carriage, and brought a rug and some cushions back.

He put the rug on the stone floor of the portico, and the cushions on the iron seat, and made her sit down.

Then he beckoned their whole staff of attendants—Cassy, Cornwallis and the two coachmen—to follow him into the house to assist in opening and airing it.

Musa was left alone on the porch, and fell to thinking of her missing child, and praying for its recovery.

While she was so engaged, a shadow came between her and the sunlight. Mindful of the ghostly character of the place, she started with a thrill of awe and looked up.

But this time the shadow had a substance behind it. A gigantic negro stood before her. They gazed at each other for a full minute before either spoke. The negro was the first to break the silence.

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"I beg pardon, Missy, but dis is mighty funny! Strangers coming into a strange house dis a way. Did Marse Bullock gib leab so to do?"

Instead of answering his question, Musa asked another:

"Are you the person who is in charge of this place?"

"I am, Missy, which I would like to be 'formed whedder Marse Land-steward Bullock gib leab for dis intrusion."

"And is your name Pendragon?"

"It is, Missy, which I would like to know whedder or no——"

"Then, Pendragon, you had better go into the house and assist the other servants in opening and airing it. Your young master has come home," said Musa, with a benevolent smile, for she truly thought that the home-coming of the young master must necessarily be a very joyful event to the old servant. She was mistaken in this instance. Pendragon stared at her in dismay for a moment, and then sank heavily down upon the ground, and sitting there flat, said slowly:

"Well—de—Lor'-a-messy—on—my—poor—ole—brack—soul!"

"Why, what is the matter, my good man?" inquired Musa, in wonder.

"To come right down on top o' me like a tief in de night, or de day o' wrath, or anyfing."

"Pendragon, are you not glad that your master has come?" inquired Musa, in surprise.

The negro shook himself together, and collected his faculties, and forced himself to answer:

"Oh, yes, Missy! perfectly oberjoyed and 'elighted to see him. On'y de s'prise, Missy, and nothin' adequate and conformable to his comin' home. Which I soon 'spected to see de debbil as he, Missis. I begs your pardin

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for sayin' anyfing so unpolite. But I 'm offen my head, Missis, and dat 's de saked trufe, and all along ob de 'light ob habin' him come home. and de mortification ob habin' nuffin' ready for him."

"It was too bad of us to come unexpectedly, Pendragon; but in truth, our resolution to do so was very suddenly formed and acted upon," said Musa, kindly; for mistaking the cause of the negro's disturbance, she really pitied him.

"Missy, der 's a question I would like to ax yer, which is a deliky question which I don't like to ask, dough dere an't no rale harm nor 'fense into it neider," said Pendragon, scratching his head.

"I think, then, you may certainly ask it," answered Musa.

"Well, den, Missis, *who is you?* Marse Gus C'rew an't got no sister, dat I do know. Dough you 's 'nough like his ma, to be his sister too. Who is you, Missy, if it an't no 'fense?"

"None at all. I am Mrs. Carew, your master's wife. And before that I was Miss Percie," said Musa, with a tolerant smile.

"Well, Lors-a-messy—on—my—poor—ole—brack—soul!" again said Pendragon, sitting down flat upon the ground once more.

"What is the matter now, my good man?" inquired Musa, at once amazed and perplexed at the manner of the old negro, whom she began to suspect to be a lunatic.

Instead of answering her question, he asked another:

"Not—not Colonel Reginal' Percie's darter?"

"Yes, Pendragon. I hope you have no objection to me as your young master's wife?" inquired Musa, now laughing outright.

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Instead of answering, Pendragon took hold of the wool on his temples with both his hands, and began as before:

"Well—de—lors—a-messy——"

But his prayer was interrupted by the appearance of Cassy, who, on seeing him, exclaimed, sharply:

"Oh! yer here, are yer? We been lookin' arter yer all ober de place. And a purty mess you keep eberyfing in. Not fit for pigs to come to, let alone ladies and gemen. But I know how it is. Yer great big body, as yer so proud on, an't got nuffin but a little tiny bit of a soul to tote it about, and it can't do it. That 's what 's de matter. Now go right in to yer master. He a lookin' for yer. And Miss Musa, honey," she added, turning respectfully to her mistress, "yer can come in now. I hoisted all de windows, and made a roaring fire in your own room."

Musa arose and followed the old nurse, who led her up the broad staircase to a long hall, from which several doors opened into lofty chambers.

"Here, Miss Musa," said the woman, opening a door on the right-hand front—"here is your room, and a fine one it was in its time, and not so bad now."

Musa followed the nurse into a spacious chamber, lighted by four high windows—two on the north and two on the east—which commanded a fine view of the magnificent mountain scenery.

A fine hickory-wood fire burned in the old-fashioned open fire-place, and agreeably warmed the room. The floor, of dark oak, was uncarpeted, but supplied with three Turkey rugs, one before the ancient dressing-table, one before the fire-place, and one beside the great old four-post bedstead. The walls were covered with a French paper representing the loves of Cupid and Psyche. The windows and the bedstead were draped with faded crimson

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moreen. And the chairs and sofas were covered with the same.

Musa drew a chair to the fire and sat down to warm her feet.

"Now, honey, I gwine to send up yer travelling-bag and luggage. And if you contrive to 'muse yerself any way, so 's to 'scuse me, I want to go and unpack de pervisions we fotch from Eyrie and see about getting some luncheon ready."

"I can excuse you very well, Cassy. But are there no women on the estate that can be called into the house to assist you? You never can get on without two or three assistants."

"Bress you, Miss Musa, there 's lots of 'em. There 's Cornwallis's two nieces and three granddaughters. He 's gone down to de quarters now to see 'bout bringing 'em up here."

"I am glad to hear it."

"But you know, Miss Musa, I 'll have to tend to 'em and struct 'em till dey gets used to fings."

"Yes, of course, I suppose you will," said the lady.

The old nurse started to leave the room, but suddenly turned about and came back slowly and gravely toward her mistress.

"Miss Musa, honey," she said, stopping and lowering her voice. "Does you know what room yer in?"

"No, nurse, no more than that it is my bedroom," answered the lady, lifting her eyebrows.

"Honey, it is de room as you was born in, when you came into dis world, and where your mother died when she went to glory," said the woman, in a low and reverential tone.

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"Oh, Cassy!" exclaimed Musa, in a voice of deep emotion, as she looked around upon the scene.

"Yes, honey, and it an't a bit altered since that time, 'cept things is faded a little. I didn't mention it to you at first, honey, 'cause I hadn't made up my mind whedder to do it or not. But jes as I was a goin' out ob de door it 'peared to me as I *must* tell you."

"I am glad you told me, Cassy. The thought that this was my poor young mother's room, will make it much dearer to me," murmured Musa, in a very tender tone.

"Den I an't sorry I told you, honey. Now I gwine try to get somefing good for lunch, and fix things up to look little like Christian people's home."

This was a very busy day for all the new household, not excepting August and Musa.

They had tea at seven o'clock. And after tea the extra servants who had been called in to help were dismissed to their quarters, and the house was shut up for the night.

August, unaccustomed to manual labor, was, as he expressed it, thoroughly worn out by his hard day's work. And as soon as his handsome head was on the pillow he was sound asleep.

But Musa could not compose herself to rest. She closed her eyes, and tried to go to sleep.

Whether she succeeded or not, or how long she lay with closed eyes before the awful interruption came, she never could certainly say.

But after a while she was roused, she knew not by what agency. She opened her eyes, and—horror of horrors!—there, bending over her, glaring at her with fixed eyes, was the most hideous and demoniac shape ever sent forth from the sulphurous fires of Tartarus.

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CHAPTER XXI.

THE SPECTRE.

If I stand here, I saw it!—SHAKESPEARE.

MUSA'S wild shriek aroused her husband, who started up, exclaiming:

"*What* is the matter? Musa! Musa!"

But she was shaking as with an ague fit, and could not immediately answer.

"For Heaven's sake, Musa, what is all this?" demanded Mr. Carew, in alarm for her health or sanity.

"Oh, August! August! as I live, I saw it!" she gasped, shuddering.

"Saw what? You are dreaming, love."

"Oh, I saw the THING, whatever it was!"

"It was the nightmare, Musa," he said, soothingly.

"No, no, no! I know what the nightmare is—indigestion, oppression, sluggish circulation of the blood, attended by bad dreams. This was no nightmare," she panted, trembling.

"What was it then?"

"Oh, the blackest, the most deformed, the most hideous thing! It bent over me and looked at me with its horrible eyes!" she gasped, shuddering and covering her face with her hands.

"Musa, my darling, compose yourself. This is sheer folly. You have had a bad dream, inspired naturally

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enough by the ghost stories that you have heard in relation to this old house. Use your excellent sense and compose yourself to sleep again," said August, calmly.

"Oh, no, no, no! this was no dream. It was a hideous THING that stood by me, bent over me, and glared at me with its dreadful eyes. *I saw it.* Oh, August, get up! Light all the candles, and rouse the servants. I cannot compose myself to sleep to-night until we have searched the house. It may be that something has got in and is roaming about," said Musa, still trembling in voice and limb, as she stepped from her bed and began to draw on her dressing-gown.

"I must do this to satisfy you, my darling, though, indeed, I do not think it necessary upon any other account," said Mr. Carew, with a smile, as he also arose and wrapped himself in his dressing-gown.

The candles that had been left lighted on the chimney-piece had burned out. The great hickory log fire in the fire-place had smouldered down to a mass of dull red and black coals.

August groped about until he found a box of matches, and then he lighted a candle and set it on the mantel-piece.

"Light another! light twenty! oh, this darkness is horrible," exclaimed Musa, nervously.

"I will light all there are here, but there are only two more," answered August, with a smile at what he considered Musa's unreasonable terrors.

"Well, three must do, then. We can leave one here, and you and I can take one each and go and search the house," said Musa.

"Let us begin with this room, then," added August.

And they carefully searched the room, looking under the

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bed, under the dressing-table, under the sofa, behind the window curtains, in the wardrobe, and in the closets.

But nothing unusual or suspicious was to be found.

"Let us call up Cassy and Cornwallis, now, and have them help us to search the other parts of the house," said Musa.

"Very well," replied August, with the same sort of a smile that he would have bestowed upon a child whose whims he was humoring.

They were about to leave the room, when an unearthly yell rang through the house!

The husband and wife looked at each other in amazement for an instant, and then Musa sank, pale and trembling, into a chair.

"Come, this is something audible, at least," said Mr. Carew.

Musa made no reply, but leaned back with blanched cheeks, half-fainting, on her seat.

"Why, what a little poltroon you are, my love," said August, in a rallying tone.

"I am not afraid of anything whatever in this material world. But I confess that the supernatural fills my soul with terror," murmured Musa, in a low, faint voice.

"Stay you here, then, Musa, while I go and unravel this mystery. I have no doubt I shall soon prove to you that all these supernatural phenomena have a very natural origin," said Mr. Carew, as he snuffed his candle and turned to go.

"No, no, no; don't leave me here! I will go with you!"

"But you are unfit for this business, Musa. If we were to startle a mouse, or a cricket, you would scream or faint, in the present state of your nerves."

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"But I cannot stay here alone! I will not!" exclaimed Musa, who was seized with another shaking fit, at the bare thought of such a thing.

"Then I will send Cassy to you," said August.

"No! I will go and stay in Cassy's room, if you will not let me go with you. I cannot stay here without you," persisted Musa.

"Come along then, my arbitrary love," replied August.

They left the room, and entered the long central hall, at the back extremity of which was Cassy's little room.

"Do you go in and wake her up, Musa, and I will stay here and keep watch until you do so," said Mr. Carew, when they reached Cassy's door.

Musa turned the knob and entered the room, and laid her hand gently on the form of the old woman.

To her infinite amazement, her gentle touch was answered by a terrible cry, while the form under her hand fell to trembling violently.

"Cassy, Cassy," she whispered.

"Oh, not yet! Don't take me yet! I an't 'pared to 'part, 'deed I an't!" screamed the old woman, cowering down in her bed and drawing the bed-clothes closely around her head.

"The house is full of bedlamites, it seems to me," said Mr. Carew, as he entered the room, where Musa was standing over the cowering and shuddering form of the old woman, and saying:

"Cassy, rouse yourself! Come to your senses! It is I!"

"Oh, is it you, Miss Musa?" exclaimed the nurse, uncovering her head, and staring at her young mistress.

"Yes, of course. Don't you see that it is!"

"Yes, honey, I see—I see it 's you yourself now. But I t'ought you was de debbil come back again. For de deb-

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bil 's been here arter me to-night, honey. He is indeed, Miss Musa! He is indeed, Marster Augurs!" cried the woman, shuddering and weeping.

"What! Have you seen anything, Cassy?" inquired Musa.

"What frightened you, old woman?" questioned Mr. Carew.

"De debbil, honey! de debbil, marster. Lord! didn't you hear me scream jes 'fore you come in, Miss Musa? Why, I t'ought people t'other side o' de yeth might a heard me yell out."

"We heard you, but did not know it was you, though that brought us to your room. What did you see, Cassy?"

"De debbil, I keep tellin' ob you, honey—de debbil, sure 's you born."

"What did he look like, old woman?" demanded Mr. Carew.

"Oh, Marse Augurs, he look somefin like—like a great big 'normous turkey-buzzard, and somefin like a awful large hairy black bull, and somefin like a sea-sarpint, and somefin like a evil spirit."

Cassy was directed to get up and dress, and join in a search of the house. Cornwallis was also called, and the four made a thorough exploration of the dwelling.

Into every room on every floor they went, and made a diligent search; but in vain. No one, no sign of any one, except the searching party, was to be seen.

After two hours spent in this investigation, the whole party returned to the supper-hall, from which Musa's chamber opened, and they paused as if to hold a council of war.

"Well, my dear Musa, you see we have made a thorough search of the whole house, and—found nothing more

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wicked or dangerous than ourselves," said Mr. Carew, with a smile.

"I did not suppose that you would find anything unusual," answered Musa, gravely.

"And now I think we may retire again. We have spent more than two hours in this wild-goose chase, and fatigued ourselves enough, I hope, to ensure sound sleep until morning, if we have accomplished nothing else," said Mr. Carew.

And in another half-hour the perturbed family retired to rest, if they could—until morning.

I think that no one slept that night.

Mr. Carew had, from the first alarm, treated the whole affair with ridicule. But he was not quite so much at ease as he seemed to be. If there was nothing supernatural in the events of the night, there was, at least, something very mysterious. And August Carew did not like mystery. He determined that he would, on the next morning, make a more thorough search of the premises by daylight than he had been able to do at midnight, with only the aid of a couple of flaring candles. So he planned, instead of sleeping.

Nor could Musa sleep, though she affected to do so, to avoid disturbing the rest of others. Musa felt sure that the hideous thing which had stood by her bedside, bent over her and glared at her, was no mere creation of a dream or a nightmare. It was a horrible reality and mystery, the very memory of which banished sleep from her eyelids.

In the morning August made a thorough search of the premises, but could find no trace of the apparition. But he made a surprising discovery, namely, that Pendragon had fled to Richmond, to his mistress, Kate Carew. Such an unaccountable proceeding filled both him and Musa with wonder and vague disquiet. And although he

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couldn't find the spectre, various members of the household came in contact with it and fled shrieking from its presence. In the course of three days, everybody in the house, except August, had encountered the spectre, and yet he perversely refused to believe in its existence. This skepticism on his part annoyed Musa, and she ardently hoped that August would have a "visitation" that would cure his unbelief.

One day Mr. Carew had gone to Eyrie for letters, and when Musa thought it was time to expect him back, she put on her seal-skin coat and hood, and took her muff, and started out to meet him. She walked down the evergreen avenue until she came to the great iron gates and the dilapidated lodge, where she sat down on the stone steps to wait for her husband.

She knew she would not have long to wait, yet she grew impatient, and soon arose and passed through the iron gates, and walked a short distance up the road, in the direction in which he was expected to come, and then turned to look at the house.

The upper windows were all hoisted now and standing open to air the long closed, damp and musty rooms.

While she stood gazing at them now under the full light of day, there suddenly appeared at one of them—

Could she believe her own eyes?—

The hideous, shapeless THING, whose apparition had appalled her on the first night of her residence at Raven Rocks.

She recognized it, with a start and a slight scream. And then she forced herself to gaze upon it calmly and fixedly. It was easy for the most timorous to do so in broad daylight, and at this safe distance. But it was not so easy to make anything out of the apparition.

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A dark, ugly, formless creature, with an ugly, indistinct face. That was all that she could make out, as she gazed steadily upon it for the space of two minutes.

"Oh, how I wish August would come now, so that he could see this thing as I see it," she said to herself, as she kept her eyes fixed, spellbound, on the apparition.

In another moment the sound of approaching horse's hoofs struck on her ear.

She turned and saw her husband galloping down the road toward the gate.

"Oh, I am so glad! Now he will see for himself," she said, as she threw her eyes again up to the haunted window.

The apparition was gone!

"Was there ever anything so provoking? Now August will not see it. And he never will believe in it until he does see it. And as for me, I shall not say another word to him on what he considers a ridiculous subject," said Musa to herself. "Any letters?" she demanded, aloud, as August galloped up and sprung from his horse.

"A half a dozen," he answered, gayly, holding up a sheaf. "And there is good news. Come to the Porter's Lodge and sit down on the steps to read your letter. That will tell you everything."

When they reached the Lodge, August tied his horse to the gate-post, and then sat down beside his wife on the moss-covered door-steps of the forsaken Lodge.

"Now, then, my dear Musa, here are three letters about the child——"

"But where is she? where is she? When can I have her?" eagerly demanded the young mother.

"I told you there was good news, Musa, and that these letters would give you the details. But I fear, after all, you will be a little disappointed; for, though the child is

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safe and well, by the last accounts, she is probably by this time half way across the Atlantic Ocean," said Mr. Carew, hesitatingly, for he hated to distress his wife.

"Oh, Heaven! half way across the Atlantic Ocean!" groaned the young mother, turning pale.

"But, my dearest Musa, she is safe and well, and in the hands of her devoted nurse, who has taken care of her all her little life, and will take care of her still, since she loved her enough to steal her away and burden herself with her support. And besides, Ferret and Mrs. Wilks have gone after her on the steamer which sailed Wednesday, and which will most probably get in to Liverpool before the sailing vessel on which the nurse and child are embarked can possibly do so. But here, read the letters for yourself. The first is from Ferret, the second from Mrs. Wilks, and the third from Wilks himself," said Mr. Carew, as he placed the letters open, in the hands of his wife.

Musa took them trembling, selected Detective Ferret's letter, and read that first. It was directed to F. A. Carew, Esq., and was as follows:

NEW YORK, Feb. 29th, 18—.

F. A. CAREW, ESQ.—*Dear Sir:* I have but a few moments to inform you that I have at last obtained a sure clue to the absconding woman and the stolen child. These are the facts:

That a woman, exactly corresponding to the description of the fugitive, and bearing the name of Mary Morris, sailed in the emigrant ship *Fairy*, which sailed from Boston last Saturday, bound for Liverpool. This woman had with her a female child, answering exactly to the description of the stolen child, and bearing the name of Musette.

Further investigation led to the conclusion that this woman, with the child in her possession, had left Inwood and taken the midnight train for Albany, whence she and the child were traced to Boston and to the ship *Fairy*.

I have only this day finished working up the case to a certainty that justifies me in the course I am now about to pursue. Obeying

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your instructions to spare no expense for the pursuit of the abductor, and the recovery of the child, and availing myself of the ample funds placed in my hands, I have this day secured a passage on the steamship *Darien,* that leaves this port to-morrow morning. I shall take Mrs. Wilks with me, to assist in identifying the woman and child. I confidently expect to reach Liverpool before the *Fairy* can arrive there—in time to overhaul the parties before they have a chance to disembark. So you see, sir, we have them, as it were, in a trap.

I shall take charge of the child and wait for the arrival of the next steamer, by which of course you will either write or come.

And now, sir, as I have a good many things to do, I will close, with my best respects to Madam and yourself. Your obedient servant,

EDMUND FERRET.

Musa finished this letter, laid it down with a sigh, and looked with an appealing glance in the face of her husband.

"Yes, love," he said, tenderly answering her silent petition. "Of course we will go over in person. This is Friday, so that we cannot catch the steamer that leaves New York to-morrow morning, but we can easily secure the one that is to sail on next Wednesday. We will go by that."

For all answer she took his hand and pressed it to her heart.

"Now read your other letters, love. They bear upon the same subject," he added.

She took up Mrs. Wilks's letter, and opened it.

It was shorter than the first, and read as follows:

INWOOD, Feb. 29th, 18—.

MY DEAR MA'AM: Mr. Ferret says he will write and tell you all the particulars about his finding a sure and certain trace of Mary Morris and little Musette, so I need not tell you about that.

I write to say how good Mr. Wilks has been in consenting to my going over to England with the detective officer to identify the child; and also, to tell you that when I get hold of the child, I shall never let it out of my arms, or out of my sight, until I set it on your lap.

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And now, dear ma'am, I must close, because I have got to pack up to-night.

With regards to Mr. Carew, I remain, truly yours,

MARGARET WILKS.

"She is a good soul, poor woman," said Musa, as she folded up this letter and laid it with the detective's. "And, by the way, I hope when she gets to Liverpool she will find her son. The ship he ran away to was also bound for that port."

"Yes, I hope she will. And if she should we must bring the boy back with us and try to restore him to his grandfather," answered Mr. Carew.

Musa meanwhile opened Mr. Wilks's letter.

It was addressed to F. Augustus Carew, Esq., and was shorter than either of the others. It was as follows:

ASTERICK HOTEL, New York, March 1, 18—.

MY DEAR SIR: I have just seen Mrs. Wilks and Detective Ferret off on the *Darien* that sailed for Liverpool this morning. They left very suddenly, in order to reach Liverpool in time to intercept the *Fairy*, on board of which, we have ascertained beyond all doubt, the misfing woman and child to be. I inclose with this two letters, one from each of the pursuers, which they left with me to mail, and which will explain matters more fully. They expect you to write, or to follow by the next steamer. If I can be of any service, pray command me. With much respect to Mrs. Carew, I beg to subscribe myself,

Truly your friend,

JEREMIAH WILKS.

"And he is another good soul. I like him better than I did," commented Musa; "and now we will return to the house."

"Yes, dear, for my ride through the frosty air has given me an appetite for luncheon," answered August, walking by her side, and leading his horse.

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"When shall we leave here for New York, August?" inquired Musa.

"On Monday, if you like."

"Yes, let it be on Monday, that we may secure the Wednesday's steamer for Liverpool," said Musa, eagerly.

And as they walked on they settled the preliminaries of the voyage, as far as they could do it by words alone.

After luncheon that day, Musa summoned her old nurse and told her that they were all to leave Raven Rocks for New York on the following Monday.

Cassy was perfectly delighted to hear it, and immediately set about packing up for the journey.

After an early supper, the family, being very much fatigued, retired to rest. And the night passed without any sort of disturbance, natural or supernatural.

In the morning Mr. Carew rode to Eyrie to get the mail. But he found nothing for Raven Rocks.

On his return, Bullock, the land steward, met him by appointment, and spent several hours with him in looking over the accounts of the estate and in receiving his instructions for its management during his absence.

The land steward departed soon after luncheon. The remainder of the day passed busily, yet quietly. As on the preceding night, the household retired early.

Musa lay awake, thinking of her child, praying for her safety, nearly all that night.

At length toward morning, from sheer weariness, she fell asleep, and slept deeply until she was strangely awakened by the sound of heavy breathing and moaning close to her side.

She opened her eyes. The room was darker than ever. The shadows were blacker and heavier. The fire on the hearth had smouldered down to a scarcely perceptible dull,

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deep, red glow. The night lamp had burned out. The pale light of the winter dawn was gleaming faintly through the crevices of the closed window shutters. But this did not much enlighten the gloomy scene.

And the sound of that heavy breathing, low moaning and muffled movement continued.

In vain she looked around for its cause. She knew that some being was present in the room at that hour, but she could not discover it, amid the heavy black shadows of the place, made heavier and blacker by the contrast of the deep, dull, red glow of the smouldering hickory fire on the hearth.

She thought of calling and waking Mr. Carew; but the dislike of his ridicule, in the event of nothing being found to account for her alarm, prevented her from doing so.

While she lay, with her heart almost ceasing its pulsations, she suddenly, at the same time, felt a stir by her side, a moan, a low cry, and—

Then the voice of her husband, saying:

"Musa, don't be alarmed! I have caught the 'ghost.' I am holding it by both hands. It is flesh and blood. Get up, my dear, and light a candle, and let us 'interview' it."

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CHAPTER XXII.

"GATHA."

TREMBLING with excitement and intense curiosity, Musa arose and hurried to the window and threw open the shutters, letting in the light of day upon the dusky room and upon a strange group at the bedside—August Carew sitting up in bed, leaning off and grasping with both hands the talons of a creature that seemed scarcely human, so dark, so ugly, so decrepit it was. It was moaning as in pain and fear, and struggling feebly to get away from its captor.

Musa approached the group and looked closely at the singular figure of the captive.

"It is an old negro woman," exclaimed husband and wife in a breath.

"Who are you?" questioned Mr. Carew, in a gentle tone, for he began to feel some compassion for the miserable wreck of humanity before him.

But the poor creature only moaned in an inarticulate anguish, and struggled piteously to free her hands.

"Musa, dearest, lock the door, and then I will release her. I hate to use any force upon a thing so old and weak as this," said August.

Musa secured the door and returned to the bedside.

August let go the hands of the old creature, who now, no longer held up by his strength, sank, as if dying, upon the floor.

August arose and slipped on his wadded silk dressing-gown.

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Musa had already put on hers, and she was now kneeling down on the floor, closely inspecting the drooping form of the miserable being there.

From appearances, it was the form of an extremely aged negro woman, black as soot and worn to mere skin and bone. The face was shrunken out of human likeness; the arms looked like long black sticks, the hands like black claws. It was half covered, rather than clothed, in rags that had lost every vestige of their original color and now dangled in dusty and dirty tatters about the skeleton limbs. The ugliness of the shrunken black face was caused more by a look of mingled anguish and idiocy, than by wickedness or malignity.

Musa, from the bottom of her heart, pitied this most wretched creature. She kneeled down beside her, took her hand and tenderly inquired:

"Who are you, my poor woman?"

"Eh?" feebly questioned the woman, rolling her deeply-sunken red eyes restlessly around.

"Darling," said August to his wife, "go and wake Cassy, to come and stay with you, while I go down-stairs and summon Cornwallis. We must find out, if possible, who this poor creature is and where she came from, and we must have her removed from this room."

"She is the same figure that I saw at my bedside on the first night of our arrival, and that I afterward saw in the open window of the north attic," replied Musa, as she arose from her kneeling position beside the fallen creature, left the room, and passed down the hall, and knocked at old Cassy's door.

"WHO DAR?" burst out in notes of terror from the awakened sleeper.

"It is I, Cassy. Dress yourself quickly, and come to my

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room," answered her mistress. And with a warning to the nurse to dress quickly, she returned to her own room, when August said:

"I will go now and call up the men. Some among them will know who this poor creature is." And he went out.

His departure was soon followed by the entrance of Cassy, who hurried in breathlessly.

Mr. Carew soon entered the room, followed by Cornwallis and by the two girls, Seely and Meely.

"Go up to the poor creature, old man, and see if, upon a closer view, you can recognize her," said Mr. Carew.

Cornwallis slowly approached the huddled form, the ragged skeleton, and said:

"Hole up yer head."

The poor old creature raised her woe-begone face to the "interviewer."

Cornwallis stared as if he were struck dumb for a minute, and then said slowly:

"Lord a messy on all our souls alibe!—why—why—it 's GATHA!"

Mr. and Mrs. Carew drew nearer the speaker. The three negro women stretched their necks to get a closer view, but did not dare to move a step.

"It 's *Gatha*, marster! Gatha as was lost, and we all t'ought was dead! Gatha!" repeated Cornwallis, still staring at the upturned, wizened, black face.

"Agatha! Good Heavens! Where has the poor creature been all this time, and what has reduced her to this pitiable condition?" exclaimed Mr. Carew, with the deepest compassion, as he bent over the poor old black wreck.

"Cornwallis, she must once have known you well. Try to make her recognize you now, and give some account of herself," said Mrs. Carew, dropping tears of pity.

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"Gatha! woman! don't you know me—Cornwallis, you know?" said the old negro, taking hold of her hand, and giving it a rousing shake, as he stared into her face.

She shook her head slowly and sadly.

"Give her a glass of wine," suggested Mr. Carew.

Musa herself ran down-stairs and got the wine and hurried back with it. Mr. Carew poured out a small glass full and put it to Gatha's lips. But she snatched it from him with her claw-like hands and drank it eagerly.

Then Musa beckoned the two girls, Seely and Meely, who were her granddaughters by their mother's, as they were the granddaughters of Cornwallis by their father's side.

"Come, children, speak to the old woman. Don't be afraid of her. She is your granny Gatha. See if she remembers you," said Mr. Carew.

The two girls slowly approached, as if they were still uncertain whether the poor old creature were not both uncanny and dangerous.

"Granny Gatha, don't you know me? I am Seely," said the most courageous of the two.

Agatha, stimulated by the wine, looked at her granddaughter with slowly reviving intelligence for a full minute, during which no one else spoke or moved.

Then she put out one black claw and hooked it into the girl's dress and drew her closer, while she muttered:

"Yes, honey; but dis is how it is. Ef I *tells*, dey will kill me. An' ef I *don't* tell, I 'll lose my mortal soul. Dere! dere 's how it is."

"What is she muttering about, Seely?" inquired Mrs. Carew, who had caught only a few words of the sentence.

"Oh, ma'am, she 's talkin' nonsense. She 's jes' as crazy

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as a June bug. 'Tan't no use to pay no 'tention to what she says. I don't b'lieb we'll get any satisfaction out'n her," replied the girl.

"Ask her where she has been all this time. Perhaps she can answer that question," suggested Mrs. Carew.

"Granny Gatha, where you been stayin' all dis time—dis two years and more?" inquired Seely.

"*Hush!* Up dere. In de cuddy room," muttered the old woman.

"Ask her why she staid up there," said Mrs. Carew.

"What make you stay up dere in de cuddy room, Granny Gatha?" inquired Seely.

"*Hush!* Dragon. He put me dere," muttered the old creature.

"There is something more in this than meets the eye and ear," said Mr. Carew.

And now a remarkable change passed over the face of the old crone. As her stimulated brain took cognizance of August Carew's personal appearance, her eyes gleamed with a lurid light of recognition, of surprise, and almost of joy.

"Oh, Marse Percie! Marse Reginald Percie! Is dat you, youse'f? And dey tell me how you was dead and gone. And here you is. And you 'll purtect me. Oh, Marse Reginald Percie, I *so* sorry as ebber I did it."

The old woman spoke with no appearance of mental derangement, but with every symptom of reviving memory and intelligence.

"What are you so sorry for having done, Agatha?" gently asked August.

"Oh, for havin' any hand in de changin' ob de chillun dat dreadful night," whispered the woman, in a frightened tone.

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"Musa, my dear, send all the servants from the room," said Mr. Carew, in a low voice.

"Cornwallis, go make up the fire in the parlor. Cassy, take the two girls with you, and go and get breakfast. It is quite time," said Musa.

When Mr. and Mrs. Carew found themselves alone with their strange companion, they shut and locked the door, and then drew near her again.

"*What children did you help to change, Agatha?*" inquired Mr. Carew, while Mrs. Carew looked on and listened with the deepest interest.

"Oh, Lor'! Oh, oh, oh! Ef I tells, dey will kill me. Ef I don't tell, I 'll lose my mortal soul. Ef I do tell, I 'll lose my life. I won't tell—not till I know I 'm dyin'; den I 'll tell, 'cause it won't make no difference. And so I 'll save my mortal soul in time. But I an't a dying now!" exclaimed the crone, exultingly.

"But you had best tell now, if you have anything to tell. You have certainly nothing to fear. This lady and myself are mistress and master of this house, and we will protect you," said August.

"Yes, surely, so you is de marster ob de house, 'cause you rented it, I 'members. But dat lady, she 's de mist'ess, is she? She must be de new mist'ess, den. I seed her befo'; but I didn't see her good. Le' me see her good."

Here Musa came forward. But the moment old Agatha's revived intelligence took cognizance of *her* she screamed and covered her face with her hands, and fell to trembling violently.

"What is the matter with you, poor soul? Surely you are not afraid of *me?* I would not hurt you for the world," said Musa, in a soothing manner.

"Oh, Miss Kate! Miss Kate! Miss Kate! Spare my

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life; and I won't never tell nothin' till I'm on my dying bed!" cried the crone, in an agony of terror.

"Whom do you take me for? Mrs. Kate Carew? I am like her in person, but I am not she. Why do you fear Mrs. Kate Carew?" inquired Musa.

"You ain't Miss Kate!" exclaimed Agatha.

"No, indeed I am not," answered Mrs. Carew, smiling at what she considered the fantasies of a lunatic. "I am not Miss Kate. I *was* Miss Percie. And I *am* Mrs. Carew, the wife of your young master—Mr. Francis Augustus Carew," said Musa.

"Stop, honey; please 'peat dat ober to me again," said the poor creature, holding her head with both her hands.

Musa, good-humoredly, repeated her statement.

"Oh! and he finks as he is de son ob ole Mr. Peter Carew?"

"Yes, Gatha.

"And you finks as you is de darter ob Marse Reginald Percie?"

"Certainly I do."

"And you 's bofe married?"

"Yes."

"Married to one anoder?"

"Yes, yes."

"And you 's bofe husband and wife?"

"Why, of course we are."

"And de housen and de lands and de niggers and de money all united into one wid you two?"

"Assuredly," said Musa, a little impatiently.

"Well, den, I hopes as it 's all right. And ef it an't all right, I hopes as it is righter dan she meant w'en she did it," muttered the old creature to herself.

August and Musa looked at each other in questioning

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dismay; for they knew the story of their nativity, and they connected it with the strange confession, or half confession, made by Agatha.

"Can you not speak a little more plainly, my poor woman? Tell us what children were changed," demanded August Carew, but in a tone and manner which were as firm as they were kind.

"Oh, Marse Reginald, I so sorry I had any hand into it!" moaned Agatha, again relapsing into imbecility and confusion.

The transitory flash of intelligence had quite passed away and left her as idiotic as ever.

"Dear August, I think we had better send for two of the women from the quarters, and have this poor creature carried to a room and taken care of, and, oh! above all things, washed and dressed and fed. She knows, or believes she knows, something or other, but we cannot get it out of her in her present condition," said Musa.

"I believe you are right, my dear. We only confuse her by our questions," assented August, as he went and touched the bell.

The summons brought Seely to the room. The necessary orders were given, and old Gatha was soon provided for.

While August and Musa were at breakfast, the morning sky became overclouded and a snow-storm came up.

"I am sorry to see this. This will prevent our going to church to-day," said Mr. Carew.

"And I shall lose the only opportunity I shall have for years of attending church in this parish. Well, I can look after my poor waif to-day, at all events. That will be an occupation worthy of the day," said Musa, as they arose from the table, and she rang to have the service cleared away.

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But there were other occupations prepared for them.

Old Cornwallis, who answered the bell and received the order, bowed gravely and then announced:

"Pendragon have come back, sir."

"Pendragon come back? Well, he's a free and easy mortal. He comes and goes at his own sweet will. When did he return?" inquired Mr. Carew, in some surprise and curiosity.

"About half a hour ago, sir."

"Where did he come from?"

"From Richmond, sir, which he say he 'rove at Eyrie this morning, by de night coach, and come straight on here."

"Well, and what does he say for himself?"

"He 'sires most respectful to 'port hisself to you, sir, soon as convenient to yourself."

"Very well. Clear away the service, and tell him to come here," said Mr. Carew.

Cornwallis quickly removed the breakfast service, and left the room.

"I suppose he wishes to give some account of himself," said Mr. Carew.

"I have an idea that he can throw some light upon the mystery of the disappearance and long concealment of old Agatha," said Mrs. Carew.

"Perhaps so," admitted her husband.

"And here he comes," added Musa, as she heard a hesitating step and a rap at the door.

"Come in," said August.

And Pendragon entered.

He bowed with the deepest reverence, and crossed the room.

He held in his hands a letter and what seemed to be a packet of manuscript.

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He came up to Mr. Carew, and with still another and deeper obeisance, he presented the letter first.

"Ah! so you have returned, Pendragon. I hope you will be able to account for your sudden and unauthorized departure," said Mr. Carew.

"Wid submission to you and de madam, sir, I hopes as de letter, my honored missus's letter, will splain all most satisfactory," replied the old man, respectfully.

Mr. Carew took the letter and examined the superscription.

It was directed:

To Mr. and Mrs. F. A. Carew.

He opened it and read as follows:

"The Shoals, March 2d, 18—.

"My dear August and Musa: You must not blame Pendragon for anything whatever that he has done. He is my own private and confidential servant, and has acted from first to last under my own absolute orders. I send with this a narrative, which I wish you both to read in private. Your affectionate mother,

"Katherine Shrewsbury Carew."

August passed this note to his wife to read, and then said to Pendragon:

"You may go. We will call you when we want you."

When they were left alone, he opened the packet, and read aloud as follows:

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CHAPTER XXIII.

THE HISTORY OF A MYSTERY.

"I AM about to make a confession, which nothing but moral cowardice prevented me from making months ago, and which only the sternest necessity could compel me to make now.

"To do this, I must enter upon a little private family history, of which you know nothing, and in the course of which I must speak of a household tragedy that will deeply grieve and humiliate you both.

"First, then, of myself."

Here followed a sketch of Kate Carew's early life and marriage, with which the reader is familiar. She then continued:

"You all have heard of the catastrophe of the *Golden Shaft*, which foundered off Point Lookout. You know that my father and my husband, who were on the boat *en route* for Washington City, were among the lost.

"Thus, by one terrible stroke of misfortune, I was orphaned and widowed in one hour. And this blow fell on me only a few weeks before my expected confinement.

"For many days I was prostrated by grief.

"And yet then I did not know the full extent of my calamity. I had afterward to learn it.

"As soon as I rallied sufficiently to look into my affairs, I discovered an alarming fact.

"It was that the vast landed estates of my late husband were all strictly entailed upon heirs male, so that if my

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unborn child should prove to be a girl, the whole estate would go to the heir-at-law, Colonel Harold Carew, of Pirate's Peak, and I and my daughter would be left in comparative poverty—poverty, the bugbear of my life, the only form of perdition I could understand and appreciate.

"This, to me, awful prospect prostrated me again, so that it was many days before I could leave my bed.

"Every one attributed my great sufferings to excessive grief for the loss of my husband and my father, and thought it natural enough, no doubt.

"In the deepest of my sorrow I received a letter from my dear friend, Musadora Percie—a letter full of affection and sympathy, in which she implored me to leave Richmond, so full of associations connected with those dear ones I had so suddenly and awfully lost, and to come to her and be comforted.

"I wrote and thanked her for her sympathy and affection, and accepted her offered hospitality.

"I went down to Raven Rocks, and was warmly welcomed by Musadora, and politely, though I thought rather coolly, received by her husband.

"I soon found out the reason. Colonel Percie was madly in love with his young and beautiful wife, and morbidly jealous, even of her female friends and relatives.

"He wanted all her love, all her thoughts, all her care and all her company to himself.

"I found my fair darling in very delicate health. She was expected to become a mother. Under these circumstances, I should have returned to Richmond, but she would not hear of my going back. She clung to my society in a nervous and trembling way that I could only account for by supposing that she feared to be left alone in the lonely old manor house with her beloved but insanely jealous husband.

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"If so, she had good reason for her fears, as I soon found out. I had not been at Raven Rocks many days before I heard from Cassy, the confidential maid of Mrs. Percie, that 'Marse Arthur' was coming home.

"Now I must tell you who and what 'Marse Arthur' was.

"In our school days, Musadora had made me the confidante of a pretty little love story.

"It seems that she and Arthur Pentliore were orphan cousins, brought up together in the house of their grand-aunt, Mrs. Letitia Montgomery. But while Musadora was the heiress of much property, poor Arthur was a penniless dependent upon his relations. The two children grew up together like brother and sister, and were never separated until the girl was sent to boarding-school, and the boy to the Military Academy at West Point.

"While we were at school together, she would show me the poetical effusions he used to write to her and send from West Point.

"She did not return his love; nor did she even see him again from the time they parted, when he went to West Point, until the time of his fatal visit to Raven Rocks, after her marriage to Reginald Percie.

"Soon after she left school she met Reginald, who admired and wooed her, and soon won her whole heart. They were married after a very short courtship.

"And now 'Marse Arthur' was coming home; not to Raven Rocks, however, which had never been his home, but to Crow Wood, on the other side of Eyrie, which had been the home of his own and of his cousin's childhood, and which was still the residence of that great-aunt, Mrs. Letitia Montgomery, who had brought them up.

"And knowing the antecedents of the young cousins,

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and the impetuous nature of Arthur, the compassionate heart of Musadora, and the morbid jealousy of Reginald Percie, my soul was filled with forebodings.

"I took the first opportunity of speaking to Musadora on the subject.

" 'I hear that Arthur Pentliore is coming back,' I said.

" 'Oh, yes,' she answered. 'He graduated at the Military Academy last summer, and has been waiting orders somewhere. He is now ordered out to Fort Ute, on the Western frontier somewhere, and is on short leave to come home and bid good-bye to his friends before his departure.'

" 'How did you hear this, my dear? Surely you do not correspond with him now,' I said, with a feeling of danger.

" 'Oh no, I should not dare. It is more than a year since I heard from him, and more than five years since I have seen him. I think he must have got over his infatuation by this time.'

" 'Let us hope so; but does Colonel Percie know anything about this youthful love affair?'

" 'Oh, yes,' she said, with a sigh; 'that is what is the matter with him. He found the roll of manuscript verses that Arthur had written me, and that I had preserved, and he read them all. And I assure you, Kitty, in one hour, my handsome and courtly husband was transformed into a fiend. He tore them all up and stamped upon them, grinding down his heels as if he would have ground them to powder if he could, while his face was livid with rage as the face of a corpse, and his blue eyes blazed like living flames. It was useless for me to tell him that the writer was the playmate of my infancy and childhood, and that I had not seen him since we parted to go to school; and that I never had had any other feeling for him than that of a calm sisterly affection. Reginald stormed and raved

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like a maniac. What a horrible thing jealousy is!' she added, with a shudder.

"'It is an insane and devilish passion,' I answered; 'but, oh, my dear, be cautious how you arouse it. Arthur must not come here, nor must you see him.'

"I said this with all the solemnity of a dreadful foreboding, which proved only too prophetic.

"But the pretty little creature to whom I spoke bristled up like an angry little bird, and answered with spirit:

"'My Cousin Arthur *shall* come here, and I *will* see him. I adore my husband, but I do not adore his mad jealousy. I am faithful to him in thought as I am in word and deed, but I will not be treated like a false woman who cannot be trusted.'

"I said not another word. When such gentle doves ruffle up their pretty feathers and erect their crests, they had better be let alone. They are not near so manageable as falcons.

"The very next day Arthur Pentliore came in company with his great-aunt, Mrs. Letitia Montgomery, a stately old lady, whose very presence commanded the sort of respect due to royalty.

"Musadora and myself were alone in the morning room when the carriage was seen approaching the house. In a few minutes the visitors were announced and entered the room.

"The stately old lady whom I mentioned before came in advance. Behind her came Lieutenant Arthur Pentliore, in the splendid uniform of his regiment.

"Musadora had not seen him for five years. I had never seen him at all.

"I examined him now with the deepest interest.

"He was not a handsome man. He was a most beauti-

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ful youth. He was not a majestic Apollo. He was a most perfect Adonis. He was of medium height and of slight, though elegant, form. He had regular, classical features, very dark brown complexion, silky, curling black hair and mustache, large, solemn dark eyes, shaded with long black lashes and overarched with heavy black brows.

"As he advanced Musadora met him.

"He took both her hands in his, and fixed his great, grave, dark eyes on hers, with such a look of passion, anguish, and infinite despair as I never saw on any human face before, and as I hope never to see again.

"She turned white and dropped her eyes beneath that gaze.

"And he, without a word, let go her hands and turned away.

"And then, for the first time, I was conscious that Reginald Percie had quietly entered the room and had witnessed this meeting, and had met that look.

"He stood less like a living man than like a marble statue, so still was his form, so livid his face.

"I held my breath for very awe.

"Dora turned pale.

"Neither Arthur Pentliore nor Mrs. Montgomery had caught the expression of Reginald Percie's face, for which chance I thanked fortune.

"Yet there was no outbreak of fury now, as there had been on the discovery of the early love letters.

"This passion was too deep for such display. He completely controlled himself. And after a moment he greeted Mrs. Montgomery, his aunt by marriage, with courtly politeness.

"Yet Dora and I both felt that he was all the more dangerous for his self-control.

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"'This is my brother-cousin, Arthur Pentliore, Colonel Percie,' said Dora, with gentle dignity, though her fair cheek whitened and her sweet voice trembled.

"Arthur bowed low, on thus being presented to his elder, and held out his hand.

"Colonel Percie returned the bow, but ignored the hand.

"And then the eyes of the two men met. And who can say what passed in that momentary mutual glance, between the blazing blue orbs of Percie and the fierce burning black eyes of Pentliore?

"'Come to your room and lay off your wraps, Aunt Letitia. I have a beautiful room set apart for you; and of course, as this is the first visit you have made me in my own house, you have come to spend some time,' spoke the soft tones of Dora Percie.

"'Thanks, my love, no, it is not worth while to take off my bonnet. We did not come to stay,' answered the stately old lady.

"'Oh, I am so sorry; but if you cannot spend much time, you can *at least* stay and dine,' pleaded Dora.

"'I thank you, my child, but I think not. We only came to call on you this morning.' Then turning to Colonel Percie, she said—'Arthur has not seen his cousin for the last six years, sir. She was about fourteen years of age then. She is twenty now.'

"'He finds her much changed, no doubt,' answered Colonel Percie, with forced politeness.

"'He finds her very much grown, at all events,' said Mrs. Montgomery, with stately good humor.

"'And he finds her very much improved, where there seemed no possible room for improvement,' I added.

"Dora, smiling, blushing, and utterly embarrassed,

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looked from one to the other of us, her seeming flatterers, until her eyes rested on the beautiful, dark, eloquent face of her cousin, when she said :

"'They are all speaking for *you*, Arthur. What do you say for yourself?'

"'The rose-bud has become the rose,' murmured the young poet, with a look more eloquent than the words.

"Colonel Percie pulled the bell so suddenly and sharply that a servant appeared as if he had been jerked into the room.

"'Mrs. Percie, you have forgotten that our guests have had a long ride. Had you not better order some refreshments for them?' he then brusquely demanded of his wife.

"'My housekeeper understands her duties, Colonel Percie,' answered the lady, in a low voice. Then, turning to the waiting servant, she said :

"'Will you inquire if lunch is ready?'

"'Lunch is on the table, Madam,' answered the man.

"'Go on, then. Come, Aunt Letitia. Reginald, give Aunt Letitia your arm, if you please. Arthur, take Mrs. Carew to the table,' said the young hostess, waiting until she saw her guests pass on in the order she had named, and then following them.

"We gathered around a table, on which were served some very choice delicacies. Mrs. Montgomery, myself, and even Dora, did full justice to the dainties set before us. But Arthur Pentliore ate little. And Colonel Percie excused himself on the ground of not feeling well, and he neither ate nor drank. He was evidently determined neither to break bread nor drink wine with his wife's cousin.

"When lunch was over we went back to the drawing-

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room, where Arthur Pentliore, in answer to the questions put to him by Dora, told us that he had but a month's leave of absence, at the end of which he was to go out to Fort Ute, on the Oregon River, which was to be his post of military duty for an indefinite number of years to come.

"'And I say that a young man had better be dead than to be buried alive out there. I want Arthur to resign his commission and to stay at home with me and look after the estate that may one day be his own, if he pleases me in this matter; but the long and short of it is, he has determined to go, even at the risk of being left out of my will,' said the old lady.

"And then they rose to take leave.

"'I hope that you and Mrs. Carew and Colonel Percie will come and dine with us to-morrow. Can you do so?' inquired Mrs. Montgomery, as she embraced her niece in bidding her good-bye.

"'I—do not know. I fear, not *to-morrow*,' answered Dora, hesitatingly.

"'Well, then, my love, fix upon some early day—the earlier the better; only suit yourself in coming, and come and bring your friend,' answered Mrs. Montgomery, as she kissed and released her niece.

"Arthur Pentliore shook hands with his cousin, fixing his eyes upon hers with the same involuntary look of infinite sorrow, tenderness and despair, as he let go her hand.

"They were gone.

"But their carriage wheels had scarcely rolled away, and the sound of them had scarcely died on the gravelled avenue, when Colonel Percie strode up to his wife and stood before her.

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"He utterly forgot or disregarded my presence, and spoke to her as if they had been alone.

"His face was as livid as it had been before; his teeth were set, and his blue eyes gleamed like blue steel stiletoes, as he said, in a low, hard, stern tone:

"'I have restrained myself with the greatest difficulty during the last two hours, and only out of respect for Mrs. Montgomery, and in consideration that she and her nephew stood under my roof, sacred in their characters of guests. But now that they have gone, *I tell you, Dora, that you must never meet Pentliore again.* He must never cross my threshold again, nor must you enter your aunt's house during the residence of Pentliore in this neighborhood. No man ever looked at a woman as he looked at you, unless he loved her with unholy passion, and—believed, at least, that his sinful love was returned.'

"While he spoke, she gazed on him in utter dismay at the depth of degradation to which his insane jealousy had descended.

"When he ceased speaking, she found her voice, and, in accents of acute distress, wailed forth:

"'Reginald! Oh, Reginald! How can you dishonor yourself so?'

"But without answering her again, he turned on his heel and stalked from the room.

"She threw herself down on the nearest sofa, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"I went and knelt down beside her, and put my arms around her in silence.

"'And even you heard it!' she wept aloud. 'You heard my husband fling that insult in my face! Oh, that I could have received it and lived on!'

"'My darling, don't grieve so bitterly,' I said. 'It is

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but the very excess of your husband's love for you that inspires his insane jealousy. Do not grieve that he loves you so excessively.'

"'Loves me! How can he love me, if he does not honor me? Or how can he honor me, if he believes such things of me?' she cried, passionately, breaking into fresh sobs and tears.

"'My child, he did not accuse *you*, he only accused your cousin of being in love with you; for which I do not blame him. I blame Pentliore; he had no right to look at you in the way he did,' I said.

"'To look at me in the way he did!' she echoed. 'Poor, dear boy! that was his poetry! Goodness knows, I have seen him look at the moon so, and at the stars!' added Dora, almost inclined, in her April-like temperament, to turn from weeping to smiling.

"'He may look at the moon and stars as often and as long and as spoonily as he pleases; but he must not look at you so. You are not moon and stars; you are a beautiful young wife with a jealous husband. There, dry your eyes and thank your fortune for a handsome man's devoted love; Colonel Percie *is* a handsome man with all his ugliness,' I said.

"And with this paradox as a parting fling, I left the room, hoping that Reginald Percie, after his burst of temper, would return to her side and console her better than I had succeeded in doing.

"I did not meet this uncomfortable pair again until dinner, when they appeared to be reconciled.

"But some evil genius seemed to preside over the destiny of this unhappy household.

"The next day, in compliance with her husband's will, Dora wrote to her Aunt Montgomery, declining an

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invitation to dinner upon the plea of indisposition. She sent the note by a groom, who returned with an answer, expressive of Mrs. Montgomery's regrets.

"Two days passed, during which we saw no more of the people from Crow Wood. But the evening of the third day we had a surprise.

"Dora and myself, with our shawls wrapped around us, were sitting out on the front piazza, when Arthur Pentliore rode up, leaped from his saddle, threw the reins to his groom and ran up the steps.

"'Good-evening, my fair cousin,' he said; 'good-evening, Mrs. Carew. It is a lovely evening! I came over with a message from Aunt Montgomery, inquiring about Dora's health. I hope you are not going to be ill?' he added, his tone deepening to one of grave tenderness as he turned to his cousin.

"'Oh, no, I am only a little indisposed; only not quite able to take a long mountain ride,' she answered, cheerfully.

"'I am very glad to hear that it is nothing more serious,' said Arthur.

"And, without waiting for an invitation to do so, he took a seat.

"'I hope Mrs. Montgomery is quite well,' I said, after a while, just by way of saying something to break the awkward silence.

"'Oh, quite well, I thank you,' he answered.

"Then he took up a guitar, upon which I had been playing previous to his arrival, and had dropped down by my side as he had come up the steps.

"'Do you play, Lieutenant?' I inquired.

"'Yes, Madam,' he answered, dreamily, as he proceeded to tune the instrument.

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"'Will you favor us, then?' I requested, dreading the arrival of Colonel Percie, and thinking that it was better he should be found playing to us both than talking to Dora.

"He bowed acquiescence to my request, played a short prelude, and then began singing 'Roll on, silver moon.'

"He had a very fine tenor voice, clear, rich and full. He sang so well that I forgot my anxiety in the delight of hearing him.

"Then he sang 'Beautiful Star,' and when he reached the refrain, '*Thou art so near and yet so far!*' his pathetic voice trembled with a pleading tenderness that brought the tears even to my worldly eyes. I glanced at Dora. She was weeping softly. He finished his song amid a breathless silence, that continued until he gently dispelled it, as he arose and stood before us, murmuring:

"'I must say good-night.'

"So saying, he raised the guitar again, tuned it anew, and swept his fingers across its chords, awakening a low, deep sob, that soon broke into a wild, thrilling wail, from which his own voice arose, first soft, tremulous, as from a sea of tears, then swelling, throbbing into a weird, despairing cry, that seemed the utterance of a soul's renunciation, as he sang:

"'Go, forget me!—Why should sorrow
O'er that brow a shadow fling?
Go, forget me!—And to-morrow
Brightly smile and sweetly sing:
Smile, though I should not be near thee,
Sing, though I should never hear thee.'

"Silently he laid down the instrument. Silently he passed away in the moonlight, and a moment after Colonel Percie galloped up to the house, threw himself from his

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horse, flung the reins to his groom, and ran up the stairs, demanding, impetuously:

"'What man was that I heard playing a guitar and singing a love-song, as I rode into the lawn?'

"No one answered him.

"'WAS IT NOT PENTLIORE?' fiercely demanded Reginald Percie.

"'Yes, it was Arthur,' replied Dora, driven at length to the wall, and trembling excessively, both in voice and frame.

"'*Arthur!*' echoed Colonel Percie, in a tone of intense scorn and hatred. 'Arthur! I forbid you, Madam, to call him by so intimate a name. And I require you to explain how he *dared* to present himself here, and how you ventured to receive him, after my positive orders to the contrary.'

"She was on the very brink of an hysterical outbreak, but she constrained herself to reply, with gentle dignity:

"'Lieutenant Pentliore knew nothing of your prohibition, Colonel Percie. Nor could I bring myself to tell him of it. I am not on such confidential terms with my cousin as would enable me to tell him that my husband cannot trust us, and that he—my cousin—had better keep away. No, Colonel Percie; if you wish to banish my cousin from the house, you will have to do it. For I cannot, and—I will not.'

"There was silence for a few moments, during which Reginald Percie's face looked perfectly ghastly in the moonlight, partly, I suppose, because he was stung by the words of his wife, as well as maddened by his own extravagant jealousy.

"At length he spoke, but in a voice quite unlike his own, even in his worst rages:

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"'Then, by all the demons in and out of Tartarus! he shall learn from ME that when he next crosses my threshold he takes his life in his hands!'

"And so saying, he strode into the house, leaving us there.

"Dora turned and threw herself upon my bosom, in that passion of shame and sorrow that she could no longer control.

"I knew not what to say to her, so I said nothing; but I kissed and caressed her in silence.

"'Oh, if my mother lived! Oh, if my mother only lived! She could tell me what to do!' said Dora, with a burst of sobs and tears.

"'If I tell you what to do, will you do it, love?' I inquired.

"'Yes, yes!' she answered, desperately, 'for I am driven to the verge of frenzy by all this!'

"'Be patient for a little while, darling. Remember that the first week of Arthur's leave has already passed, and there are but three weeks left, and then he must go.'

"'Ah! but in this first week Reginald has almost driven me crazy with his causeless jealousy. And in the next three he will kill me, or himself, or some one else!' she cried.

"And, oh, how awfully, how prophetically, she spoke!

"I did not think so then. I answered, soothingly:

"'Not if you will do as I advise you, dear Dora. Will you do so?'

"'Yes, yes! I told you I would.'

"'Well, then, write a short note to your cousin, kindly requesting him not to come here again, and send that note off early to-morrow morning.'

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"'What! without giving him any explanation of my strange request?' she inquired, raising her brows.

"'Certainly—without giving him any explanation.'

"'What will he think?'

"'It does not matter, comparatively speaking, what he thinks. But most probably his intuitions will guide him to a true solution of the problem.'

"'Never! My poor, simple-hearted boy-poet! He will never imagine that the man I gave myself to could ever be jealous of the boy I refused. But I will do as you counsel me, Kate. And now I think we will go to bed—

"'To bed—perhaps to sleep!'

"Very early the next morning I arose from a sleepless pillow, dressed myself and went down-stairs, where I found Dora Percie already at her writing-desk in the library, and in the act of sealing up a note, for which a groom waited at the door.

"'Good-morning, dear,' she said, as she arose and kissed me. 'You see I *can* take advice.'

"'I am glad for your sake, sweet Dora,' I said, or something like it.

"She turned to the groom and gave him the note, saying:

"'Ride as quickly as you can to Crow Wood, so as to get there if possible and hand this to Mr. Pentliore before he goes out.'

"The boy touched his forelock by way of a 'reverence,' and went out.

"And in a few minutes we heard him galloping off.

"Several days passed, and we saw no more of Arthur Pentliore, until, one fatal night, when our household was wrecked and the powers of evil triumphed!

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CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE FATAL NIGHT.

"THE days that followed were full of the dark and gloomy calm that precedes the fell, destructive storm!

"Dora Percie pined herself ill with an intense fear that took the form of foreboding. Colonel Percie misinterpreted her illness. In his jealous madness, he convinced himself that she was grieving after her absent lover. He brooded over this impression until he became a morose monomaniac on the subject. He grew moody, sullen and snappish as a mad dog.

"Events went on in this way for nearly two weeks, and the month of Arthur's leave was drawing very near its close, when we might hope to breathe freely again.

"About this time, our monomaniac seemed determined to try an experiment and test the truth of his jealous suspicions.

"So, one evening, he told his wife that on the next morning he should start for Richmond on business, and should be absent for a week. And the same night he ordered his servant to pack his valise and to be ready to wait on him.

"Very early the next morning, attended by his valet, he set out for Eyrie, to take the morning stage-coach for the city. He rode in the close carriage, and his valet rode on the box-seat with the coachman. When the coachman brought the carriage back, he reported that his master had

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reached Eyrie in time to intercept the early coach, and that he had set out for Richmond.

"That night Dora and I slept together for company. And we talked nearly all night. We speculated about our future children. And we promised each other that if one child should be a boy and the other a girl, they should marry. I was then looking every day for the arrival of my child. Dora expected to see hers in about two weeks. At that time the great subject of my anxiety was that my child should be a boy; for on the chance of its being a boy hung all my hopes of earthly prosperity: a boy would bring me wealth, a girl only poverty. And as our talk had re-awakened and intensified all my anxiety, I could not compose myself to rest, even after Dora had talked herself to sleep.

"The next morning I was very weary.

"But Dora seemed stronger, fresher and brighter than she had been for the last two weeks. We breakfasted at our usual hour.

"The morning was so fine that I proposed to Dora that we should take a ride, adding that we had not been out so long, and that we greatly needed the fresh air.

"'Oh, no, no! no!' said the poor child, eagerly, 'I will not leave the house until after Arthur has left the neighborhood. I would not meet him again, I would not even run the least *risk* of meeting him again, especially in my husband's absence—no! not for the preservation of my own life, if that were necessary.'

"I saw that she was right, and ceased to urge the point.

"'But *you* might go, Kate. There is no earthly reason why *you* should not go. Let me ring and order the carriage for you,' she added, kindly.

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"'No, indeed, I do not care to go without you,' I replied.

"And though she still urged me to take an airing, I continued firm in my resolution to stay home and keep her company.

"I felt very weary all that day. I ascribed my weariness to the effects of the sleepless night I had passed.

"And so after luncheon I left Dora Percie lounging in an easy-chair and reading a new book, and I went to my own room and lay down, and soon fell asleep.

"I slept for several hours. When I awoke, the short winter afternoon was almost over. The sun was sinking to his setting.

"I saw that it was time to dress for dinner, so I started up and rang for my maid Agatha, an elderly woman, who had been my nurse and was now my sole attendant.

"But before my summons could be answered, a feeling of illness came over me and compelled me to sit down.

"When Agatha entered the room, I told her to lay out my dress and help me to get ready for dinner.

"But she looked in my face and smiled, and said:

"'I finks if I was you, young mistress, 'stead o' dressin' up for dinner, I jes' ondress and lay down ag'in.'

"'Why should I, Agatha?' I inquired.

"''Cause, honey, I finks you looks proper bad, and you 'll be worse afore you 'se better, and dere 'll be a derival in de famberly before many hours,' was her encouraging reply.

"I followed the woman's advice, because I knew that she was a very experienced nurse, and also because I was compelled by fast increasing illness to do so.

"'Agatha, you can attend to me yourself, I hope?' I inquired.

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"'Who, me? Well, I reckon I ought to, honey! I nussed enough ladies in my time.'

"'Very well, then. Make no noise. Do not alarm any one. I do not wish to have Mrs. Percie agitated in her present delicate condition. Do not let her know anything about my illness until all is safely over,' I said.

"'Hi, honey, who you teachin'? your grandmammy? I got a head-piece on my shoulders, I is. What call I got to make any fuss 'bout sich a simple, nateral ewent as a derival in de famberly? You tell me where to find everyfing I want afore you gets any wuss and leabe de res' to me. Dere now.'

"I gave the nurse my instructions, where to get every article that she asked for.

"Sometimes she had to leave the room, but she always locked the door after her, to prevent the intrusion of anybody during her absence.

"And sometimes she had to ring for one of the housemaids to bring her something from the kitchen, but then she always 'interviewed' the assistant in the hall outside the chamber door.

"All these precautions were taken to prevent Dora Percie from being disturbed.

"Meantime it grew dark and Agatha had to light the chamber lamps.

"In the midst of my trouble I wondered why nobody came to call me to dinner, for certainly the dinner hour had come and gone.

"In an interval of suffering I inquired of Agatha:

"'Has no one been up here to call me down to dinner?'

"'No, honey.'

"'Then they must know that I am sick. And Mrs. Percie will find it out, and agitate herself,' I said.

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"'No, honey, dey don't. Nobody but Marty has been anigh de room, and she don't know nuffin' but what I tell her, and I tell her as how you got a burning headache, and want hot water to bave your feet. Dat what she finks, and I tell her not to let on to anybody, fear it will come to Mrs. Percie's ears, and 'sturb her mine,' the old woman explained.

"'Quite right, Agatha. Still it is very strange Dora has not sent for me to come to dinner,' I said.

"And this subject of speculation divided my mind with that other question, whether my expected child would be a girl or a boy, until I became too ill to care for anything 'in the heavens above, the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth.'

"The sun had long set. And

"'The first watch of the night was kept
By the red planet Mars—'

when my long looked for child arrived.

"'As purty a little gal as ebber you did clap yer two looking eyes on, young mist'ess,' said the nurse, as she laid the little creature beside me.

"Yes; it was a girl. Yes, Musa Percie, it was yourself. Musa Percie you are by marriage, but not by birth! Musa Carew you were by birth, born to poverty, not to wealth!

"I had no heart to welcome the little girl whose birth took away all my wealth, and gave me only poverty instead.

"I looked at her and kissed her sadly, without any of a young mother's rapture—almost without any of a mother's affection.

"'Now, honey, as all is over *so* safe and nice, and everyfing in order, mayn't I jes' go and tell Miss Dora? And

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Lor'! won't she be s'prised, just? Mayn't I go now and tell her, honey?' pleaded the old woman, burning with all a gossip's desire to run and tell such news.

"'Yes, Gatha, go and tell Mrs. Percie—— But stop! stop! we 'll do better than that. We 'll put a better surprise on her than that. Go, and don't hint a word of what has happened yet to any living soul; but ask Mrs. Percie please to come up here and see me. And then when she comes we will show her the baby and see how she looks,' I said.

"For, notwithstanding my disappointment, I felt that I could somewhat enjoy Dora's surprise.

"My old nurse, chuckling to herself with gleeful anticipation of fun, went out and locked the door on the outside and took the key with her to prevent any intruder coming in and making a premature discovery during her absence.

"I lay there, very down-hearted on account of my girl, yet looking forward with some satisfaction to the entrance of Dora Percie.

"In about ten minutes Agatha re-entered the room alone.

"'Is Mrs. Percie coming directly?' I inquired.

"'Honey, when I 'quired for Miss Dora, dey tell me as Miss Dora go out jes' as dinner was gwine on de table, and an't been in since—— Now don't you go startin' up in bed and starin' in dat way, honey! You 'll do yourself a mischief!'

"The old woman added this piece of advice to her communication, when she saw the effect of that communication upon me.

"'Dora Percie went out just before dinner—that must have been at dusk—and has not been in since. That accounts for no one coming to call me to dinner. But how

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very strange! and how late it must be! What o'clock is it now, Agatha?'

"'Honey, it 's nigh ten o'clock. And by de same token, you mustn't 'cite yerself any more one bit 'bout Miss Dora. She an't gone offen de plantashun no how, 'cause she walked. And she big 'nough to take care o' herse'f. Now you 's jes got to hab some nice tea and toase, and den go to sleep. Now I gwine down to get your tea and toase. And you lay dere good and quiet till I come back,' said Agatha, as she got up to leave the room.

"Soon my nurse brought me my light refreshment, of which I partook to her great satisfaction. Finding me still wakeful and excitable, she gave me an opiate. It was malpractice, no doubt, but it was *the* practice at that day, especially among old nurses. And on that particular occasion I think it happened to do good. But for that opiate, which if it did not give me sleep, at least dulled all my sensibilities, I never could have lived through the night of horror that followed.

"And now, I must say, that for the knowledge of the events of that night, outside my own chamber, I am indebted to hearsay alone.

"Dora had been summoned to the bedside of a dying old woman, a slave who lived in an open space beyond a belt of woods across the lawn. The woman's husband, old 'Sias, had come for her, and she had gone with him, without notifying any of her household. The sick woman was dying when Dora arrived at the cabin, and passed away with Dora's hand clasped in hers.

"Dora arose gravely from her seat, kissed the calm dark face, closed the eyes, drew the white sheet up over the head, and then signed to the negro woman to come and take her place.

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"As with reverent manner they approached the death-bed, Dora whispered:

"'Send up to the house for anything that is needed. I am going there now.'

"Then she looked for 'Sias, to see if perhaps he was able to attend her back. But the poor old bereaved husband was kneeling at the foot of the bed, sobbing as if his heart would break. So Dora glided softly out of the cottage, wrapped her shawl closely around her, and took her way to the house.

"She was not afraid. There really seemed to be no cause for fear. She crossed the narrow belt of woods and entered upon the front lawn, from which she could see the face of her house, lighted up here and there by the evening lamps shining through the crimson curtains of the windows whose shutters were not yet closed.

"As she was crossing the lawn, however, she heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs coming from the direction of the house down the evergreen avenue.

"While she was still wondering who the horseman could be, he came into full view, and seemed to recognize her at the same instant that she identified him. He was Arthur Pentliore!

"She had scarcely ascertained this alarming fact, before he turned out of the evergreen avenue and cantered briskly across the lawn in her direction. She stood surprised, amazed, transfixed, unable to fly.

"As he drew near he leaped from his horse, and leading him by the bridle walked up to her side, holding out his free hand and saying, in his grave, sweet way:

"'Cousin Dora, I am so glad to meet you. I have been up to the house to see you; but they told me that you were not at home, and they could not tell me where you were.

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And—may Heaven forgive me for the ill thought, Dora; but—I coupled this asserted absence of yours with the part of the strange note you sent to me, and I imagined that you were in all the time, and had only given orders to be denied to me. So I mounted my horse and set out for home, feeling very bitterly sad; for, Dora, I had only come to say good-bye. I am going away to-morrow. But before I say good-bye, cousin, I must ask you to forgive me for the injustice I did you in my thought. I should have known that you were incapable of such an act. And I must also entreat you, dear Dora, to tell me in what manner I have been so unhappy as to offend you, that you should write to me such a strange, cruel note as I received from you, my sister-cousin?'

"As he spoke, he took both her hands in his own, and held them fast, while he looked in her face with that sad, wistful gaze that seemed at once a history of woe, a prophecy of ruin, and an appeal for sympathy.

"But she pulled her hands from him with sudden violence and terror, breathlessly exclaiming:

"'You have done no wrong at all! You have not offended me in the least. But oh! go! go! go! Every instant that you stay here is fraught with deadly peril to yourself and others.'

"And as she spoke, she gazed around upon the lonely night scene in the park, as if she half expected to see some murderous enemy start from behind a bush or tree—though she at that moment believed that her husband who, in his jealous fury, had threatened her cousin's life, was a hundred miles away.

"'Oh, go! go! In mercy to yourself and me, leave this place!'

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"And with these words, she sprang from his side and ran on toward the house.

"He gazed at her in utter amazement for an instant, and then sped after her, and overtook her, and caught and held her hand, as he exclaimed:

"'Dora, for Heaven's sake what is the meaning of this? I swear that I will not leave you till you tell me! If my presence does not offend you, whom *does* it offend? Tell me that, and I will go.'

"'*Colonel Percie!*' she answered desperately. And then she bowed her head and felt as if she should die of shame at the admission that her husband could be jealous of her.

"'Good Heaven!' slowly murmured Arthur Pentliore. 'Can that be possible? Then indeed, for mine own honor as well as yours, I must say good-bye. Good-bye, Dora—sweet cousin, good-bye! And may you be very happy!'

"And as he spoke, he raised her hand to his lips, dropped it, and turned away.

"'STAND, VILLAIN!' suddenly cried a stern voice near. And Reginald Percie strode out from a group of alder bushes and stood before him, with a revolver levelled within three feet of his heart.

"Dora Percie shrieked, dropped upon her knees, and held up her hands in agonized, speechless deprecation.

"Arthur Pentliore stood still, confronting his deadly enemy.

"'Colonel Percie,' he said, 'how dare you use opprobrious language to me? How dare you bar my path and threaten my life? Lower your weapon, sir, and let me pass.'

"'Budge one step, and you are a dead man!' cried Colonel Percie.

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"'Oh, Reginald! Reginald! Mercy! Mercy!' shrieked Dora, clasping her hands.

"'Silence, traitress! I told you what I would do if I ever should catch this scoundrel in your company again. I have caught him now. *I knew I should catch him,* if I only watched and waited long enough! I have caught him now! Caught him in the dead of night alone with you in the park! And he shall take the consequences of his and your act.'

"'Sir!' sternly interrupted Arthur Pentliore, 'you shall not so belie my cousin in my presence. This meeting was accidental on her part. I came here only to bid her good-bye. She did not expect me.'

"'YOU LIE!' coarsely retorted Reginald Percie, forgetting every gentlemanly instinct of his nature.

"'COLONEL PERCIE!" exclaimed Arthur Pentliore, with flashing eyes.

"'Oh, Heaven help me! Oh, Reginald! Reginald!' wildly pleaded Dora, holding up her hands.

"'Be silent, I command you, traitress!' roared the infuriated man.

"Then turning to his fancied rival, he hissed:

"'I say you *lie,* you villain, when you call this meeting an accidental one! What! an accidental meeting between my wife and yourself in the park, at dead of night? *Faugh!* It was a preconcerted meeting. Preconcerted, because *she* thought that I was away at Richmond. *I am here.* I told her if ever I caught you by her side again, I would kill you before her eyes. And by all the fiends in flames! I will do it! Thief! coward! miscreant! die in your wickedness!' levelling his pistol straight at the heart of his supposed rival.

"'Reginald! Oh, Heaven!' shrieked Dora Percie, starting forward.

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"But there was a flash of fire, a sharp report, and the body of Arthur Pentliore leaped into the air and fell forward in a heap, face downward—dead!

"An hour after this, Marty, one of the colored women in whose charge Mrs. Percie had left the remains of poor Henny, was crossing the park, on her way from the negro quarters to the house, for the purpose of procuring some necessaries for the occasion, when she came upon what she first, in affright, believed to be two dead bodies, lying in the snow, near the group of alder bushes.

"Without daring to go near enough to identify them, she turned and fled back to the 'quarters' and gave the alarm.

"And soon a half a dozen negro men, with lanterns, gathered to go to the fatal spot.

"They were followed a short distance behind by at least twice that number of frightened but intensely curious women.

"The men drew near the group, stooped and lowered their lanterns to examine the bodies.

"'Good Lord!' exclaimed one, in accents of horror. 'It is Marse Arthur Pentliore, in a puddle of blood!'

"'Oh! oh! oh!' cried another, with sudden grief and terror. 'It 's our mistess! our mistess murdered here!'

"And all the negro men and women crowded around the group, with exclamations, groans and cries of grief, fear, horror and unspeakable amazement.

"And then they began hurriedly to speak of moving the bodies up to the house. And some of the men were dispatched to the quarters to bring doors.

"And they went quickly on their errand, spreading consternation as they passed among the negroes who had not yet heard of the catastrophe.

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"They soon returned, bringing two doors, which they laid upon the ground near the bodies.

"The men tenderly raised the corpse of Arthur Pentliore and carefully laid it out upon one of the doors.

"The women reverentially approached the form of their mistress, but when they began to touch it they found that she still breathed.

"'She's alibe! Oh, thanks be to goodness, she's alibe!' exclaimed Martha, the woman who first made the discovery.

"'Run, Martin! Run fast as you kin to the quarters and fetch a mattress and some clean blankets. We mustn't lay *her* on no door,' she added.

"The man ran as fast as his limbs could carry him, and soon came back with a mattress and a pile of blankets on his head.

"The mattress was prepared, and the form of the poor insensible young wife was laid upon it and carefully covered over with the blankets.

"One man was sent on before to warn the housekeeper at Raven Rocks of what was approaching.

"And four men raised the mattress, with its sorrowful lading, by the four corners, and carried it slowly toward the house.

"Finally two men, bearing the door with the dead body of Arthur Pentliore, brought up the rear. And so the mournful procession moved on.

"No words can convey any adequate idea of the consternation and horror that seized the household when the insensible form of their beloved young mistress and the gory corpse of Arthur Pentliore were brought into the hall.

"I did not learn the awful facts for some hours after-

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ward. They were very carefully and quite properly kept from me.

"The corpse of Arthur Pentliore was laid out on a bed in a spare room, to remain there until the authorities of Eyrie could be notified of what had happened.

"The revolver and an odd glove that had been picked up near the scene of the murder were also laid with the body.

"Dora Percie was taken to her own chamber, undressed and put to bed. And my Agatha, as an experienced nurse, was called to attend her, while waiting the arrival of the physician who had been sent for.

"Dora Percie recovered from her deadly swoon; but she never recovered her reason. That had fled forever!

"In the course of that night she gave birth to a son, born some weeks before his natural time. The doctor had not arrived. My Agatha was her sole attendant as she had been mine. And with this opportunity came to me the overpowering temptation to commit that act, whose memory, in the midst of all my splendor, has filled my life with gloom. And this was the way in which it happened.

"I told you that my nurse, finding early in the evening that I was restless and sleepless, gave me a dose of opium to quiet my nervous system.

"And so while all the horrors of that most horrible night were being enacted in the park and in the house, I lay in my quiet chamber, not sleeping indeed, nor needing sleep, but with every nerve at rest, in a state of heavenly calm.

"It was about midnight that my nurse entered the room, to see how I was getting on. Finding me awake and perfectly calm, she ventured to break the lightest part of her news in this way:

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"'Don't reckon as you 'll see Miss Dora to-night, honey."

"'Why?' I inquired serenely, feeling very indifferent upon that and every other subject.

"'Well, yer see, honey, she 's sick. And I do suppose as dere will be anoder derival in de fambly 'fore morning.'

"'Is that so?' I inquired, with perhaps a trifle more interest than I had felt before.

"'Yes, honey, and not a soul to tend to her, 'cept it 's only me. Boy sent arter de doctor to Eyrie airly in de ebenin' come back, and say how he can't find him. Nobody to tend to de madam but only me. Cassy she down bad as she kin be wid a raging toothache. An't no good to nobody. Nobody to tend to de madam but me. I dunno what in de name o' de Lor' she 'd a done ef I hadn't happen to be here long o' you.'

"Agatha did not drop a hint of the awful tragedy in the park, or of the consequent insanity and dangerous condition of Dora Percie. She said nothing that was likely to disturb me. But my interest in her news was increasing.

"'Gatha,' I said, 'you have not told any one yet of my baby?'

"'No, mistess. 'Deed eberybody so took up long ob— No, mistess; I an't told nobody.'

"'Then don't tell them a word about it just yet. And don't tell any one about Dora's baby until you come and tell me first. Do you hear?'

"'Yes, mistess. And now, honey, seein' as you is so well, I go 'tend to my oder patient.' And she went away. An hour after, Agatha came to my room, bringing a little white bundle of wailing life in her hands.

"'Here, mistess, for de love ob de Lor', take dis little

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fing and put it to yer breas', and take care ob it. *Its mother can't.*'

"'How is Dora?' I inquired first.

"Well, she 's—she 's—she 's not able to take care ob de baby yet, honey. Not like you, you know. Facts is, she don't even know as she 's got any baby,' replied the old woman.

"Dora was dying, though the woman properly enough refrained from telling me then, and for some hours afterward. Then I asked the question that I had been burning to ask ever since she brought the baby in.

"'Is this child a boy or a girl?'

"'A little deliky boy, honey.'

"''Gatha! Does anybody know about its being a boy?'

"'No, honey. Not eben its moder; nor yet about its bein' here at all. There ain't a soul in this part of the house but me to know anyfing about anyfing.'

"'Then, 'Gatha, listen to me. If you tell about Mrs. Percie's baby at all, tell everybody that it is a *girl*. And tell them that mine is a *boy*. Will you do this for me, 'Gatha?'

"'Yes, honey, sure,' said this devoted slave. 'Wouldn't I do anyfing in de worl' you tell me to do, even a'most ef I was to die for it?'

"'And do I not know that you would, my dear, faithful 'Gatha? Then go to Mrs. Percie and attend to her, and as soon as you can leave her with safety come back to me. And then I will tell you the reason why I wish to swop children with her without letting her, or any one else, know anything about it,' I said.

"'I mind what you say, honey. And I s'pects I knows what you mean. I has heard people talk 'bout de C'rew

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'state bein' 'tailed on to de boy heirs, and how you wouldn't have nuffin of it, ef so be your chile was a gal,' said the nurse.

"'That is the case, 'Gatha. And I know you will stand by me,' I said, delighted to find that she understood me so easily, and would serve me so thoroughly.

"I spent the next two hours in fighting down all conscientious scruples. Dora Percie, I said, being a young wife, might have many more boys after this one; but I a widow could never hope to have one to heir the great Carew estate. The temptation was too overpowering! I yielded. When Agatha came back we matured between us our plan for exchanging the children. And that morning the news was spread through the household that Mrs. Percie had a fine girl, and I a puny, delicate little boy. And the wiseacres of the kitchen shook their heads and said:

"'No wonder, poor soul! Losing her husband the sudden way she did, and fretting and pining after him, as she must have done, injured the child, and so no wonder he came into the world such a poor little puny boy.'

"Later in the morning the doctor came. But he could do no good to Dora Percie. She passed away that afternoon. The doctor visited me and looked at both the children, and asked me if I thought I should be able to take charge of both infants until a wet-nurse could be procured for Mrs. Percie's little girl.

"I was so pleased to hear him say Mrs. Percie's little girl, so naturally, that I promptly declared myself to be quite equal to the care of both children.

"It seems that Dr. Mix had been warned that I knew nothing of the household tragedy. So he never hinted it to me.

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CHAPTER XXV.

AFTER THE MURDER.

"It transpired that Reginald Percie had really not left the neighborhood of Raven Rocks, when he affected to go to Richmond.

"He had said that he intended to *start* for Richmond, and so had deceived his wife into the belief that he was *going* there.

"And at Eyrie he had actually taken his seat inside the Richmond coach and started as for that city, and so had convinced his servant that he had really gone there.

"But, in fact, he went no farther than a little post-town called Fir Top, where he got out of the coach and walked off to a farm, where he happened to have a race-horse in training.

"Here he hired a good nag, and under cover of the dark night, rode back to Raven Rocks.

"He left his horse at the stable of his land-steward, at the base of the mountain, and went on foot to the park, where he walked and watched around the house until after midnight, when he returned to the land-steward's house and astonished Mr. Bullock by asking for a bed there for the night, and saying, in explanation, that he had been watching for a poacher whom he wished to identify.

"The bed was promptly got ready for 'the squire,' and he retired. He breakfasted with the steward's family, warned them to say nothing to any one of his being there,

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and then walked out into the wooded part of the park, where, under cover, he watched all day the approaches to the house.

"At nightfall he hastened back to the steward's house, took a slight meal, told Mr. Bullock that he meant to watch again that night, and then hurried forth to the park.

"He watched and waited there through the tedious hours of that cold winter evening until after ten o'clock, when he gave up the vigil, for that time, and turned his weary steps once more toward the steward's house.

"It was when he was taking a short cut through the loneliest part of the park, in this dead hour of the night, that he suddenly came upon the unhappy pair standing under the deeper shadows of the group of cedar trees. He took no time to ascertain how accidental was their meeting, how blameless their conversation, but in his jealous and insane fury he shot down his fancied rival as has been described, and then set out for the town of Wendover, which was the county seat, where the court was at that time sitting. He arrived shortly after sunrise, went to a magistrate's office, stated that he had slain the lover of his wife, and gave himself up to answer for the deed.

"The coroner arrived at Raven Rocks that afternoon, viewed the dead body of Arthur Pentliore, empanelled a jury, and proceeded to hold the inquest.

"Reginald Percie was brought from Wendover in charge of two sheriff's officers, and confronted with the dead body.

"He had not learned the death of his wife, and therefore he was calmer than he otherwise could have heen.

"The coroner found unexpected witnesses in the crowd, and was proceeding to take their testimony, when Colonel Percie stepped up to the table, and said:

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"'Let this cease. I killed the caitiff because he deserved death at my hands. If I had not killed him last night, I should have killed him this morning, or the first time hereafter that I should find him. I do not regret the deed. And I am prepared to take the consequences.'

"Having said this, he returned to his seat between the two sheriff's officers.

"After this, there was nothing to be done but to bring in a verdict in accordance with the prisoner's confession.

"This was done, and Reginald Percie was regularly committed to prison on the charge of the willful murder of Arthur Pentliore.

"Before he was taken away from the house, however, he was led into another room, where the family physician was waiting for him, and Dr. Mix gravely informed him of the death of his wife.

"Reginald Percie was brought to his senses as by the flash and shock of a thunderbolt.

"At first he could not believe it.

"What! She, young and strong and firm and full of bright, defiant life! She to die so suddenly! He *would not* believe it.

"But when the truth, with all its ghastly details, was forced upon his mind, to perfect conviction; when he learned that she had kept the house, and had no visitor during his absence, until that fatal night, when she was called out to attend the death-bed of a favorite servant, and that she was on her return from that mission of mercy when she met Arthur Pentliore, who had been to the house openly, to take leave of the family, and that the meeting in the park had been purely accidental on both sides, even as the victims had declared it to have been—then for the first time Reginald Percie felt himself to be a murderer.

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"And when he learned further that his innocent wife had been stricken down to madness and death, by the same blow that killed her cousin; that though she recovered from her deathly swoon, she never recovered her reason, but died after giving birth to a little girl, his horror, anguish and despair were boundless.

"He demanded to see the remains of his wife. And when he was taken to her chamber, where the beautiful statue-like body of Dora Percie lay, he fell upon it in such a paroxysm of agony, uttering such groans and cries of anguish as not all the tortures of the Inquisition would have been able to wring from his pride.

"When the storm of his passionate despair had in some measure subsided, he asked to see his child.

"Word was brought me in my sick-room—I had been informed of the terrible fact—to send the little girl to be seen by her father before he should go to prison.

"I took the child from my bosom, put her in the arms of Agatha, and sent her down-stairs.

"I was afterward told that Reginald Percie took the child in his arms, wept over her in an agony of sorrow, and exclaimed:

"'If I could ever again rejoice at anything, I should rejoice that you are a girl, my child—that no boy of mine will ever carry down to posterity my blighted name! You are a girl, and in the future some just man may love you for yourself alone, and well enough to overlook the family dishonor, for which you are not in any way to blame, and to marry you, and so change your blighted name. And your family woes will be forgotten. So may it be!'

"And so saying, without a blessing or a kiss, as if he felt indeed that his blessing would be a ban, and his kiss a contamination, he placed the child in the nurse's arms,

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and with a look of unutterable anguish, he turned away and buried his face in his hands.

"A few minutes later Reginald Percie was seated in his own carriage, attended by two sheriff's officers, and on his way to the Wendover jail.

"When Agatha brought the child back to me, and reported the words of the supposed father, I not only felt consoled, but justified in my action of changing the children.

"'You see, nurse, you and I have done no harm, but good in this affair,' I said.

"'Yes, mist'ess,' assented the woman, readily, 'I see dat soon 's ebber Marse Reginald say how he so glad she gal, cause some o' dese days she marry and change her name.'

"'Yes,' I continued, 'my action was not only justifiable, but meritorious. Both children will be benefited by the exchange. For my little girl, as a Carew, could have inherited no portion of her father's great estates, which are strictly entailed upon the male line. But as a Percie she will inherit the vast wealth of the Percies and Fairfaxes, which is not entailed. So in making her a Percie I have made her fortune and pleased the father too. On the other hand, the little boy, as a Percie, would have inherited with his parents' vast wealth a tainted name that he could not have got rid of by marriage, but, on the contrary, must have imposed upon any young lady who might have consented to be his wife. But, as a Carew, he will inherit the great Carew estates, with an honorable, untarnished name. So in making him a Carew I have conferred an incalculable benefit upon him, and secured my own prosperity as well.'

"Agatha listened to all this as to an oracle. She was very profoundly impressed with a sense of my wisdom.

"And I knew not what sort of moral blindness came

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upon me then; but I, also, felt extremely well satisfied with myself. That which at first had seemed an impulsive act of selfishness, now appeared to be a deed of the greatest prudence and benevolence.

"So that night, being at peace with myself and all mankind, I slept the sleep of the righteous.

"I will not linger over the dreadful scenes that ensued. Reginald Percie was smitten with inexpressible remorse and despair. He would take no steps to defend himself, but his friends put forth every possible exertion to save him from conviction. Their efforts were in vain. The jury brought in a verdict of murder in the first degree, and he was sentenced to be hanged. Then his friends petitioned for his pardon, and as it was evident that he would not live to the day set for his execution, the Governor of the State granted the pardon, and the dying man was brought home to Raven Rocks.

"Reginald Percie was sinking under no special disease, but by a general failure of the vital powers. He spoke but little, only murmuring from time to time:

"'I fulfill the law! I give "a life for a life!"'

"It was on Friday evening, just seven weeks from the fatal night of the homicide, when, in the strong words of the common people, he 'changed for death.' He knew me no longer. He talked to Dora, to Arthur, to his aunt, and to his mother, as if they stood beside him.

"His last words were:

"'I give "a life for a life!"—Arthur!—It is not hard!—I come, Dora!—Mother, I come!'

"And so he passed peacefully away.

"'Ah, how much we had all to be thankful for in this quiet departure, so different from the awful doom that had been pronounced against him!

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"And this I will say for the fierce, passionate, hot-blooded man: that, if ever the deepest repentance won pardon, then Reginald Percie was forgiven for the crime that I firmly believe to have been committed under the influence of temporary insanity.

"Four days later, we laid the remains of Reginald Percie beside those of his young wife.

"After the funeral I prepared to leave Raven Rocks, of which I had become thoroughly sick.

"But then I had to part with my lovely little dark-eyed girl, who, by the will of her supposed father, was destined to be brought up in a neigboring State, that she might not hear of her family tragedy.

"Cassy, who was nursing a young child of her own at that time, took charge of the babe, and, under the immediate supervision of Mr. Locke, conveyed it to his house in Washington City, there to abide until proper country lodgings could be found for her.

"I wept long and bitterly at parting with my child; but comforted myself with the reflection that I had secured for her a magnificent fortune, which she could never have obtained except through this separation, and by the substitution of a boy in her place had secured to him and myself a great estate, that I at least could not have continued to enjoy without a supposed male heir.

"I went back to Richmond and took up my residence in the handsome town house that my late husband had purchased and furnished for my use, and that I now had the satisfaction of believing would be my own for the term of my natural life.

"Here, after all the bustle of the removal was over and we had settled down comfortably in our own home, an alarming piece of news awaited me.

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"Agatha came to me one day and said:

"'Mist'ess, I don't want to scare you, but I got a mighty bad piece of news to tell you.'

"'For Heaven's sake, Agatha, what is it?' I exclaimed, frightened and conscience-stricken.

"'Now, honey, don't be scared, don't. I said how I didn't want to scare you, fust fing.'

"'Is it anything about the exchange of the children?' I inquired, dropping my voice to a low whisper and trembling in every nerve of my body.

"'Well, yes, honey, it 's 'bout de chillun. It 's all found out by somebody 'sides we,' she muttered.

"'Who knows it?' I gasped.

"'Pendragon.'"

"I heaved a deep sigh of relief. For if there was one human being in the world upon whose love, loyalty and devotion I could entirely depend, Pendragon was that one.

"He had tended me from my babyhood up to the present hour. He had been my 'horse,' drawing my little carriage in my infancy, my groom, attending me in all my rides in my childhood, and my own especial man-servant in girlhood and womanhood. He had followed me to my new home when I married, and had attended my husband and myself when we crossed the ocean. He was very proud of his old master's family, and it was his favorite boast that he was 'none o' your C'rew niggers; he was one o' de Shooberry cullud people.'

"Such was Pendragon's record.

"For the rest, his love of me was his only religion; his duty to me his only law; and I his only object of worship.

"That was the reason why I felt so relieved when I heard that *he* was the custodian of my secret.

"But in another moment I relapsed into anxiety.

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"I asked myself, how did Pendragon find out my secret? And might not others have discovered it as he did?

"I was about to put these questions to Agatha, when an instant's reflection convinced me that it would be better to see and question the man himself.

"'Go, Agatha, and send Pendragon up to me immediately,' I said.

"The woman went down-stairs to do her errand.

"And in a few minutes Pendragon presented himself.

"As the black colossus stood before me, with his head bowed in an attitude of utter self-consecration, I felt how faithful he was, how ready to lay down his life for me, if necessary.

"And, moreover, I knew that whatever I had done, or might do, would seem altogether right and proper in his eyes.

"His queen could do no wrong.

"'Pendragon, I hear that you have discovered my secret,' I said, fixing my eyes upon him.

"'Axdently, mist'ess, axdently; no ways but so; and would cut de tongue outen my head 'fore ever I 'd tell it,' he answered, with respectful earnestness.

"'I am sure of that; but now tell me how you found it out, Pendragon?'

"'Well, mist'ess, I was makin' of a fire in your sittin'-room nex' to your bedroom, and de door was open 'tween de two. I come in so easy o' purpose to keep from 'sturbin' you, so you, nor likewise 'Gathy, couldn't hear me. And I lay down de logs on de fire saft as I was stealin' eggs from unnerneaf of a settin' hen. And den I hear you and 'Gathy talkin' 'bout changin' of de chillun. And I says to myse'f, how ef my mist'ess did it, it was *right*, and dat was

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all about it, and I 'd nebber tell, no, not ef dey laid me on hot coals to make me do it.—And I 'd bite my tongue off first,' added the giant, with emphasis.

"'I am sure you would. But you will not be put through any such frightful ordeal, my good friend, even if any one else overheard the conversation besides yourself; but I hope no one else did.'

"'No, mist'ess, dey couldn't, 'cause dere was nobody in de room 'cept 'twas me; and de door leadin' to de passage was shet and was a good way from de open door onto your room besides.'

"'And there was no one in my room except Agatha and myself. So I suppose the secret is safe.'

"'I suppose it is, mist'ess; but if you s'pects it ain't, and s'pects any partickler person knows it, as oughtn't to know it, tell me who it is and *I'll make it safe,*' said the colossus.

"I shuddered! I often shuddered at the blind devotion of my slave, which made him as ready to murder as to die for my sake.

"'There is no one, Pendragon, who could possibly, under the circumstances, have discovered my secret. I know that it is safe.'

"'Yes, mist'ess, and if ebber it shouldn't be, jes let me know and *I'll make it safe,*' he repeated.

"It is scarcely necessary to say that in after life I proved the fidelity of Pendragon to be far more enduring than that of Agatha. Agatha's devotion to me had conditions and limits. Pendragon's was unconditional and unlimited. There lay the difference.

"I have now given you the full history of your exchange as children, with all the circumstances that led to the act, and all the temptations that prompted it.

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"What followed, you both know, either from hearsay or from personal experience.

"As the years rolled on, I congratulated myself more and more on the fortunate exchange that I had made, and felt more and more secure in my position until three years ago, when I was rudely startled out of my fancied security.

"It was winter, and in the height of the Richmond season, when I was living in my town house, in a whirl of fashionable pleasure.

"If I remember aright, I was dressing to go out to a dinner party, when a letter was brought me bearing the Eyrie post-mark and superscribed in the most abominable handwriting I ever saw.

"I opened it with a feeling of simple curiosity, and without any premonition of the shock it would give me.

"The letter was from my faithful slave Pendragon.

"And it gave the alarming information that old Agatha had been converted at a camp meeting and was suffering, under a severe visitation of conscience, for the part she had taken in the exchange of the children. In a word, she meant to make a full confession of what she called 'the fraud,' and it was only at Pendragon's earnest solicitation that she consented to defer that confession for three days until she could see me.

"I do not think that you can even imagine the effect this letter had on me. Exposure and ruin after all these years of prosperity and triumph! There was madness in the thought. And I was prepared to use any sort of means that might be necessary to save myself. There was no time to write. I must hurry down to Raven Rocks and see the maniac at once, before she could have an opportunity of plucking down ruin upon my head."

Here followed an account of Kate Carew's memorable

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visit to Raven Rocks, and of the imprisonment of old Agatha, with Pendragon as her jailer. She concluded this portion of her narrative as follows:

"I said to Pendragon, 'You must keep Agatha closely confined; but take as good care of her and treat her as kindly as will be consistent with her safe keeping.'

"'Yes, mist'ess, I can do dat. But ef she 's to be kep' perfect safe, dere oughtn't to be nobody about de house 'cept 'tis me—nobody at all which could ebber be a spy on me, mist'ess,' he explained.

"I acknowledged the prudence of his proposition, and assured him that he should have the exclusive possession of the house with his prisoner.

"That same afternoon I left Raven Rocks for Eyrie. And that night I took the stage for Richmond, taking old Cornwallis with me, and leaving Pendragon in sole charge of the manor house and its secret captive.

"You will now understand the mystery of Agatha's disappearance, and the origin of the Raven Rocks ghost story.

"But there are other events of more recent date, and intimately bearing upon your present and future welfare, that I must hasten to explain.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

OLD HARRY'S MAGNANIMITY—ANOTHER SHOCK.

"At the close of the second day after leaving Raven Rocks, I arrived at Richmond.

"I remained in Richmond only long enough to pack up my wardrobe, and then I went on to Washington to accept the invitation of my Aunt Shrewsbury, which was cordially endorsed by her benefactress, Miss 'Percie,' as she was falsely called.

"I need not dwell upon my arrival in Washington and first meeting with Musa 'Percie.'

"It took all the strength of my will to control the emotions that almost overwhelmed me on beholding in her a beautiful counterpart of myself, as I had been at her age, and as indeed I still remained with very little change.

"My so-called son did not join me in Washington as I had invited him to do. His studies confined him to his college.

"But I did not regret that when I saw more brilliant prospects opening before my daughter.

"Enough. To dwell further upon this period would be but 'vain repetition.'

"Two years later Musa refused a duke to marry the very man, of all men, whom it was best for her to marry. And if my ambition for my daughter's advancement was somewhat disappointed, my conscience was at least soothed. And I made up my mind, upon the first convenient oppor-

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tunity, to enlighten the young couple as to the secret of their exchange. I said to myself that now all was well; no harm had been done; no one had been wronged.

"Strangely enough, I never thought of the heir-at-law, who had been diplomated out of the Raven Rocks estate. I come now to what brought this heir-at-law to my mind.

"You know that a few weeks after your marriage, that is to say, about the middle of February, the Washington season closed for Lent.

"I accepted an invitation from Clarice Howard to accompany Mrs. Shrewsbury on her visit to 'The Shoals.'

"I came down here with Mrs. Shrewsbury on the first of March.

"We were met at the landing by Colonel Carew and Espirita, who had been asked to meet us at 'The Shoals.'

"And as soon as I saw him, I remembered and said to myself:

"'There is the heir-at-law of Raven Rocks.' And my slumbering conscience was disturbed, and at the same time all my good intentions disarranged.

"But this did not last long. I cast care to the winds, as I have always been accustomed to do, and gave myself up to the enjoyment of my visit, and especially of my old worshipper's attentions.

"Whenever my conscience tried to trouble me, I soothed it by the assurance that if ever a fair opportunity presented itself I would certainly set all things right between the heir-at-law and the actual possessors of Raven Rocks.

"The opportunity, or I should rather say, the necessity, of an explanation came much sooner than I had expected or desired.

"On Thursday last, Pendragon arrived from Raven

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Rocks, and told me of your unexpected advent there. I knew then that the day of reckoning had come. And I felt really glad and relieved that the duty of explanation was at last *forced* upon me. No one can know the weight of a guilty secret but the one who has it to bear, and who has not the moral courage to cast it off.

"Colonel Carew was coming to ride with me that morning. And I resolved that as soon as he should arrive, I would call him to a private interview in the library, and there 'make a clean breast of it,' by telling him the whole story of the exchange of the children.

"The ordeal that was before me did not even deprive me of an appetite for breakfast. I knew I could depend on the devotion of my old worshipper to put the fairest construction upon my act. And as he was the only one who had really been wronged, he was also, of course, the only one of whom I felt obliged to ask forgiveness.

"After breakfast I went up-stairs and dressed myself in the most becoming riding-habit and hat that I possessed. I took extra pains with my toilet, and really think I looked unusually well.

"Then I went down-stairs into the drawing-room, which was unoccupied by any one else, and there I waited for my old adorer. He was soon announced and entered the room. After the usual greetings had passed between us, and I was about to invite him into the confessional, I was, to my surprise and relief, forestalled in my intention by his abruptly saying that he admired me more than any other living woman, and asked me if I would accept him as a life-long worshipper, in the shape of a husband.

"There was my opportunity ready-made to meet my necessity.

"I laid my hand in his, and told him that I would will-

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ingly, gladly accept him as my husband, but that, in truth, I was not worthy to become his wife.

"This piece of humility so affected the old gentleman, that he swore in terribly strong language that I was a perfect woman, a goddess and an angel, which, if any man questioned, he was ready to blow out that man's idiotic brains, and to take the consequences.

"I laid my hand on his again with a closer pressure, and told him that in my early youth, before I was twenty years old, I had been subjected to an irresistible temptation, and in yielding to it I had committed a great sin.

"Then I stopped, for he suddenly turned pale as death and burst into a cold perspiration. I then went on and in a few, brief, hasty words I told him the story of the exchange of the children. He suddenly raised himself up, and wiped his face and drew a deep breath of relief, and said:

"'Oh! is that all? Why, I thought—thought by what you said, I thought——' and then he stopped; but he looked relieved and radiant.

"'That is all,' I said, coming to his relief; 'but is not that enough?' I gloomily inquired; for I was disposed to magnify my sin, so as to provoke him to depreciate it.

"And I do believe that his will was so good to me, that he would gladly have assured me that I had performed a wise and good act in the exchange of the children, only that he was, with all his faults, too honest to do that. So he said to me:

"'Well, child, if you have done evil, you certainly had, as you say, an almost irresistible temptation toward it, and much to palliate it. If ever there was a cruel and unjust law, it is that of entail, which cuts off the daughters, the most helpless part of a family, and settles property on the

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sons, or failing them, on perhaps some distant male heir-at-law. And if I am the only party wronged, I forgive you freely, Kate! If Heaven forgives you as freely as I do, you can pass the sponge over the slate, child, and commence a brand new account—as most sinners are too apt to do, Kate, as soon as ever the old one is squared.'

"I declare I was so moved by the rough magnanimity of the old man that I caught his hand and pressed it to my lips with as cordial a kiss as I ever bestowed in my life.

" 'And more, I tell you, Kate,' he added, 'while I live your children shall not be disturbed in their possession of Raven Rocks. I am sorry I cannot control the disposition of the property after my death, but as the estate is so absurdly entailed upon the male line I cannot do it. So after my death, the heir-at-law—whoever the thief may happen to be, for I am sure I don't know—will come in and take possession. And now I want an answer to my question. Will you take me for your husband, my dear?' he inquired.

" 'Of course I will, and will try to make you as happy as ever I can,' I answered. And so we were engaged.

"Well, when old Peter Carew died, grand old gentleman that he was, I resolved that if ever I did marry again, I would not marry an old man. But, you see, in all my widowed years I have had but two classes of suitors—impecunious young men, with whom I only flirted, and wealthy old men, not at all like my princely first husband, and at whom I laughed. And now, at forty-one, I am about to marry another old man. He is sixty-three.

"However, I like Pirate's Peak. No one of the proprietors has ever appreciated it yet as I do. I shall make it a magnificent marine residence, that shall be the envy of all the wealthy and fashionable world. It is near Bay

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Beauty, and near the Shoals, and so I shall live among my own people.

"And I like the Old Harry too, though the world will never believe it. I really *do* like the good-hearted, hot-headed, bad-tempered, generous, violent, overbearing old fellow.

"*And, oh, how I shall enjoy breaking him in and training him!*

"We are to be married very soon—sooner than Espirita is, because, as Old Harry pathetically put it, we have not so much time to spare as the young folks have. I requested him to speak for himself, as I had full thirty or forty good years before me yet.

"Espirita is indignant. I overheard her tell her father that:

"Kate would certainly pay him off well, for forgetting her mother so soon. And that she thanked fortune she should be out on the frontier, far away from the sound of our inevitable squabbles, and with nothing worse than Indian warfare to disturb her peace. And, in conclusion, she warned him that if he should get badly worsted in our fights, he must not come to her for safety, for she would not protect him.

"Old Harry bore this scolding with wonderful meekness for him. I think that Espirita must have begun to train him herself.

"Now a few words of explanation, at the last. You will notice that in the first part of this manuscript the writing looks older than in the last part. In fact, it is older. It was written last autumn, when you two were first betrothed, and when I thought to put you in possession of the secret, and preferred to do it in writing rather than in person.

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"The last few pages were of course added after the arrival of Pendragon and the interview with Colonel Carew.

"No one here, except Colonel Carew, knows anything about the exchange of the children, nor do we intend to let them know it until we have seen and consulted you.

"I shall send this off early to-morrow morning by Pendragon, who will leave in the seven o'clock boat for Richmond, and go on immediately to Raven Rocks. It is late. Good-night. KATE CAREW."

During the reading of this communication, very little had been said between August and Musa.

Pauses, mutual glances and sighs, more frequently than words, had expressed the feelings of embarrassment and humiliation with which they received her confession.

Musa, for the first time, heard all the particulars of that dark domestic tragedy, which had so long and so unjustly overshadowed her own young life.

And it was no relief to her mind, to learn that it did not concern her own family in the least, but that it concerned the family of her husband, whom she loved more than her own life.

And it was a shame and sorrow to know that her own mother had been guilty of such a fraud as she had acknowledged.

Musa understood now from whom she had inherited that power of secretiveness which had tempted her to conceal her own real life from the knowledge of those who had loved and trusted her so entirely, and whom she, in return, should have loved and trusted perfectly.

And she bowed her head in utter self-abasement.

August learned, for the first time, that he was not the son and heir of Peter and Kate Carew, but that he was one

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of the handsome, fiery Percies, descendants of Hotspur, whose beauty of person and brilliance of intellect he had inherited, happily without that excess of pride and violence of temper, which in the case of Reginald Percie had brought ruin upon their house.

Having finished the perusal of the manuscript, Mr. Carew folded it up, laid it upon the glowing fire, and held it down with the point of the poker until it was burned to ashes. Then, as the white dust floated up the chimney, he put the poker on its stand, and said:

"There! now let us forget all about that confession, except where we are forced to remember it."

"But, August, what shall we do? It is all so very mortifying and perplexing! What *can* we do?" inquired Musa.

"My love, we 'can' do our duty. We can always do that, under all circumstances. And now we must do the duty nearest to us, of course. We must give up Raven Rocks. And, dear, we have enough without it. We have Crow Wood and Bay Beauty, and the house in Richmond and the one in Washington. We have a plenty without Raven Rocks, which must be restored."

"But, oh, the embarrassment, the perplexity, and the mortification attending all this!" said Musa, in distress.

"My dear, there need be none of the annoyance you fear," soothingly replied August.

"And then our names!" she continued. "What an entanglement is there! You were born a Percie, and fraudulently brought up as a Carew, and you married me, a Carew, who had been fraudulently brought up as a Percie. And I find out that I, who thought myself by birth a Percie, was really a Carew; and when I thought myself a Carew by marriage, find myself a Percie! It is confusing

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enough to derange one's mind. August, what can be done about our names? It would make a terrible talk if now you were to resume the name of Percie. Yet I do not see what else you can do, since it is your own."

"I shall never resume the name of Percie, my love. My unhappy father, in the midst of his deepest misery (as we learn from Mrs. Carew's narrative), yet rejoiced that no son of his would ever carry down his ill-fated name to posterity. His dying will shall rule me in this hour. I will never resume his name, to pass it on to any son of mine. I retain the time-honored name of Carew, which was your name, and by which I have been known all my life. And I will take measures to have it made legally my own."

"That will be very wise; but oh! the publicity, August!"

"There need be little or no publicity. Much of this business can be done quietly. And besides, we are going to Europe, you know, to be absent several years. And even if there should be some little question and conjecture why I should require an act of legislature to make more completely my own the name I was always known by, it will all pass out of the minds of men before our return. Come now, dear! We have sat too long over this worrying subject. Come, get your wraps and come out with me for a walk before dinner."

They went down the evergreen avenue leading to the porter's lodge, and out upon the high road. The short snow-fall that had kept them in-doors all the forenoon had ceased, and the sky had cleared.

As they walked on, Musa asked a question that her heart had been aching to ask ever since they had finished reading Kate Carew's confession, but which she had refrained from asking lest she should appear too anxious to trust her own

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personal feelings in the way of her husband's interests. And even now she put the question in its most delicate and unexacting form:

"How long do you think this business of the estate will delay our voyage to Europe, August?"

"Why, not an hour, love—not one hour, of course. Do you think, dear Musa, that any 'business' can be so important to me as that of the recovery of your child; or any interest so urgent, so pressing, as that of allaying the anxiety of your heart? Dear wife, trust me once for all, when I assure you that your happiness is the first object of my life," he earnestly replied.

She burst into tears, and caught his hand and pressed it to her lips and to her heart, as she murmured:

"Oh, I am so unworthy of you! I feel it more and more every day that I spend in your society and know you better. Yours is love without self-love. And oh! I am so unworthy of it! I, in whose nature even love is alloyed with selfishness. I am so unworthy of you, August!"

He stopped her self-accusation with a caress, and they walked on in silence until he said:

"Yes, we leave this to-morrow morning for New York. And we sail on Wednesday, as arranged. You are quite prepared, Musa?"

"Oh, yes. I finished all our preparations last night, even to the packing of the little hand-bag and the laying out of our travelling suits," answered Musa.

"That is well. We must start very early. We must not risk losing a stage-coach, a train, or a boat, if we would make sure of our passage in Wednesday's steamer. And if the *Darien* makes her usual fast time, we may get to Liverpool in season to intercept the sailing ship, the *Fairy*, I think it is, and take our child off before the ship lands."

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"Oh! the prospect thrills me with joy, August!" said Musa.

They walked on, and made the circuit of the wall surrounding the park, and then returned to the house in time to dress for dinner.

"Fate meets us in the dark!"

After dinner the husband and wife returned to the small, crimson parlor in which they had passed the morning in reading Kate Carew's Confession.

They seated themselves in two crimson-covered easy-chairs, before the fine wood fire, and prepared to make this last evening at home a very pleasant one.

Between them stood a round table covered with a crimson cloth. Upon it stood a lighted astral lamp, around which lay books and papers.

Musa and August sat talking over the prospects of their voyage and of the strong probability of reaching Liverpool by the fast steamer, in advance of the slow sailing ship, and of taking the child before the nurse could have an opportunity of landing and hiding herself even for an hour in Liverpool.

Musa began to look among the books on the centre-table for something to read aloud, when her eyes and hand at once alighted on a packet of papers, and she exclaimed:

"Why, look here! Here are the New York papers. They do not usually reach us until Monday morning. How is this?" she inquired, as she began to tear off the envelopes.

"Why, I suppose Pendragon, who arrived by the Richmond coach at Eyrie last night, had the forethought to call and get our latest mail for us. And now I think of it, I remember seeing him lay a packet of newspapers on the

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table just as he handed me Mrs. Carew's manuscript. But the contents of that manuscript actually drove all thoughts of the other parcel out of my mind, and I really should not have thought of it again if you had not happened to see it. How many papers have you there?"

"Three. Here, take these two. I want to look over the *Herald*," said Musa, handing over a *Tribune* and a *Times* to Mr. Carew.

He opened the first-named, and began to look over its contents.

He was deep in a political editorial, when a piercing shriek from Musa made him start to his feet and spring toward her. He was too late!

The paper had dropped from her hands, and she had fallen to the floor in a death-like swoon.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

LIFE OR DEATH.

In great alarm, August Carew caught up the fainting form of his wife from the floor where she had fallen, and laid her on the sofa.

Then he seized a glass of water that stood upon the table and dashed a little of it over her face.

The shock revived her. With a gasp and a shudder, she recovered her breath and opened her eyes.

"How are you, dear love, and what caused this swoon?" inquired August, bending over her and tenderly wiping the dampness from her face.

She looked at him in a dull, bewildered way, and answered nothing. A few seconds passed.

And then she returned to full consciousness only to fall into the wildest lamentations and the bitterest self-reproaches, which filled the mind of her husband with astonishment and anxiety.

With all the vehemence of her unrestrained, impassioned nature, she abandoned herself to the storm of sorrow that swept over her soul—writhing, wringing her hands, twisting her white fingers in her ebon locks, and uttering the deepest sobs and groans.

Only from her despairing cries could he gather at length that there had been another disaster at sea, and that the *Fairy* had gone down in a gale with nearly all on board.

At last, fearing for the sanity, and even for the life of

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his beloved wife, he hurried to the medicine chest and prepared a dose of morphia, which he brought to her.

"Musa, my dearest, take this. It will calm you," he said.

"Oh, yes! yes! will it? I wish it would calm me unto death! unto death! and rid me of myself, my curse, and rid you of me, your living bane!" she cried, as she grasped the glass and eagerly swallowed its contents.

She soon fell under the soothing influence. Her suffocating sobs subsided, her deep sighs ceased. And she became so calm that her husband called her women in to attend her. They came promptly.

"Don't you be no ways scared 'bout dis yer, Marse Gus," said Cassy, as soon as she perceived the lady's condition, and mistook its cause; "don't you be 'tall 'larmed. It 's werry nateral in her state o' health, Marse Gus, which I 's seen her so before," she added, as with assistance of the two girls she raised the beloved mistress and conveyed her to her apartment, and carefully and tenderly put her to bed, where she soon fell into a deep sleep.

Then, for the first time, August found leisure to examine more particularly into the causes of her distress.

Leaving her in the care of her faithful nurse, he returned to the drawing-room, and picked up the paper that had fallen from her fainting hands to the floor. The first column upon which his eyes fell told him the terrible truth. Almost overcome by the sight, he sank into the nearest arm-chair, as, with all the eagerness of anxiety, he read the heading of the fatal article:

"ANOTHER AWFUL DISASTER AT SEA. WRECK OF THE BARK FAIRY, WITH TWO HUNDRED SOULS ON BOARD. FULL DETAILS OF THE DISASTER AS REPORTED BY THE SURVIVORS PICKED UP IN THE LIFE-BOAT BY THE MERCURY."

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Then followed voluminous accounts of the shipwreck as given by half a dozen eye-witnesses. Mr. Carew read the whole of the tragic story through. And then, head-sick and heart-sick with horror and grief, he covered his eyes with his hand, and sat wondering how he should ever be able to comfort his wife in her unparallelled afflictions, when her sorrow must be deeply embittered by remorse for the terrible consequences of her own wrong-doing, in the tragic fate of the child she had unnaturally put away from her own maternal bosom, and thus exposed to the very disaster and death it had suffered.

Thinking of these things, August Carew dreaded the awakening of Musa from her opium sleep. Of course, now there could be no further question of their journey to New York and voyage to Europe. For she would be totally unfit for the journey, even supposing that there was still any object in taking it, which there was not.

The night passed drearily, and in the morning Cornwallis was sent to Eyrie for the doctor.

August, bending over Musa, saw her lips move; and bending lower to catch the words she was trying to form, he heard her gasp as well as she could for the ague that shook her nearly to dissolution.

"August, dear, never mind. It is better even for *you* that such an unhappy wretch as I am should die."

"Oh, hush, Musa! hush! You will not die, dear love! This is but a common chill," replied her husband, controlling himself with a great effort.

These were the last intelligible words that Musa spoke for many days. The ague passed off, and was succeeded by a burning fever that soon mounted to her brain.

August Carew never left her side. He wrote for his

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mother and Mrs. Shrewsbury to come to Raven Rocks at once, telling them of Musa's perilous state.

Days passed. Saturday morning dawned. It was a very anxious day on many accounts. The chief cause of anxiety was that the crisis of Musa's terrible fever was approaching. The next twenty-four hours would decide her fate.

Saturday afternoon her fever was higher than it had ever been. She no longer tossed about or moaned, but lay silent and motionless in the grasp of the dread disease. Her head seemed burning up with an inward, raging fire. The ice-cloths placed upon it dried up in a few moments.

August sat on one side of the bed, constantly renewing the applications and silently praying to the Lord for help, as only they pray who see their beloved ones in the grip of death and feel their own impotence to save.

Cassy sat on the other side, wretched because she could do nothing, though she would have given her own old life for the life shrivelling away in that cruel inward fire.

The doctor, whose head-quarters were now at Raven Rocks, had gone to visit his other patients and had not yet returned.

The awful stillness of the sick-chamber that in a few hours might be the death-chamber, was broken by a low rap at the door.

Mr. Carew signed to Cassy to go and see who was there. The woman obeyed, and through the partly opened door a short, whispered conference was held.

Then Cassy closed the door, and came to the side of her master, and whispered:

"Miss Kate C'rew and Madam Shooberry have 'rived."

"Thank Heaven! Where are they?" inquired August Carew, in a low tone.

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"Dey 's bofe down in de parlor, waitin' to come up an' see Miss Musa."

"Here, Cassy, take my place for a few moments, while I go down and see them," whispered Mr. Carew, as he noiselessly glided from his seat and from the room.

He hurried down-stairs and opened the parlor door.

There he found the two ladies still in their travelling suits, standing before the fire, just off their long journey, but too much excited by anxiety to be sensible of fatigue.

"Oh, August! is it true?" inquired Kate Carew, rushing toward him.

"It is too true!" he murmured, in broken accents.

Neither the man nor the woman at that moment thought of the strange confession that had recently been written by the one and read by the other, and which had so entirely changed their relations to each other.

Kate burst into tears.

"How do you do, Mrs. Shrewsbury? It was very kind of you to come," said Mr. Carew, gravely saluting the elder lady.

"I could do no otherwise. I would hasten to Musa in her extremity as soon as I would to Clarice. But I hope the case is not so bad as it has been represented to be," said the old lady.

"It could not be exaggerated. I fear she is sinking," said August, struggling to maintain an outward composure, while his soul was on the rack.

Kate threw herself into an easy-chair, sobbing convulsively.

"Let me go to her at once," said Mrs. Shrewsbury, beginning to draw off her gloves.

"But you are tired," said Mr. Carew.

"And she is in extremity. I will go to her now. There

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will be time enough for me to rest after——" Mrs. Shrewsbury paused for an instant, and meeting Mr. Carew's keen, anxious, agonized gaze, she added, valiantly, "after she has got well."

While speaking she had been hastily divesting herself of bonnet, veil, furs and mantle, and she was now ready to be shown to Musa's room.

"Come, then, dear Madam. I have heard that you are a model nurse, and I shall be more than grateful to you, if you can do anything for my poor wife," said August, as he led the way up-stairs.

He led his visitor into the sick-room and up to the side of the bed. She bent over and looked at the patient.

There Musa lay, motionless, helpless, unconscious of all around her. They might have let in a glare of light—she would scarcely have seen it. They might have talked loudly at her side—she would not have heard them.

Mrs. Shrewsbury took the parched wrist between her fingers and felt the flying pulse, whose fierce, swift beats could not be counted. She laid her hand upon the red-hot head and snatched it away immediately.

"*Why*," she whispered, earnestly—"*why* has not her hair been cut off? Get me a pair of shears immediately."

"Her beautiful hair!" said August.

"This great shock of hair is helping to kill her—is depriving her of her very last chance of life. Get me a pair of shears, Cassy! I *wonder* the doctor did not order all this heavy hair cut off."

"He mentioned it, but did not press the matter."

"Ah, he thought she was going to die anyhow, I s'pose, and that it did not matter. But as for me, I never give any one up. Cassy, are you going to bring me a pair of shears?"

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"Yes, mist'ess—here dey is," said the old woman.

Mrs. Shrewsbury went ruthlessly to work upon that glorious suit of hair. She passed her hand under Musa's head and shoulders, and lifted about half a bushel of it on her arm, and laid it up over the pillow, to be cut with more ease.

"How hot that kept the back of her head and neck! Good gracious! no wonder you couldn't break the fever!"

With these words Mrs. Chief-Justice proceeded to execute the sentence she had passed. As she snipped away, the beautiful long purple-black tresses fell under her shears. August, sitting near, with a large newspaper spread across his knees, reverently, tenderly gathered them up as they fell; and when all had been cut off, he folded them up in the paper, and put them carefully away.

And Musa's beautiful head was smoothed and raised higher by two or three more pillows, and covered with ice.

And then, by Mrs. Shrewsbury's order, her hands and feet were plunged into separate basins of hot water adjusted on the bed so as to accommodate them. And the ice to the head, and the hot water to the hands and feet were renewed as often as necessary.

Then leaving Musa in a more comfortable condition than she had found her, Mrs. Shrewsbury retired to change her travelling suit for a dressing-gown and to take a cup of tea. After these refreshments she returned to the sick-room and peremptorily ordered Mr. Carew off to bed.

At first he absolutely refused to go.

"Well, you say that this night will decide her fate. Probably it will. And you know now who is the best fitted to guard her through the night: the anxious, troubled young man, worn out by a week's watching, or the self-

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collected, experienced woman who comes fresh to the duty, and who has already given a proof of her skill."

"But can we not both stay? I will not interfere. I will only sit here," pleaded August.

"No. If you do not go to bed immediately, I will throw up the case," said Mrs. Chief-Justice, with her most supreme judicial manner.

"I will go. Heaven bless you, Aunt Shrewsbury! Words cannot thank you," said Mr. Carew, as he went away.

He went no farther than the next room, where, without undressing, he threw himself upon the outside of the bed, feeling sure that he should keep awake, watching and listening with the keenest vigilance for any sound or summons from the sick-room.

But so great was his bodily prostration, that no sooner was his head down on the pillow than his senses were whirled away and whelmed in a deep and dreamless sleep. The night waned, and he slept on. Morning dawned, and he slept on. The household was astir, the doctors came and went, people walked to and fro in the hall, outside, and came in and out of his own room; and the sleeper, undisturbed, slept on.

The struggle between life and death was going on in the next chamber, in the frame of her who was dear to him as his own soul, and still the sleeper, worn out in mind and body with a week's watching and anxiety, slept on, in a deep and dreamless sleep, oblivious of all the past, unconscious of all that was going on around him in the present.

At length the late winter sun arose, and shining brightly through the open shutters of the uncurtained and neglected window, struck full upon his eyelids and woke him.

He started up with a keen pang of remorse.

"Oh, cruel! cruel!" he cried, "for me to sleep at all;

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and more than cruel for them to let me sleep through these last precious hours of her dear life."

He hurried impetuously out into the hall toward his wife's chamber. He met Kate Carew coming out of the sick-room.

"How is she? How is my dear wife? Oh, *why* did you let me sleep so long?" he demanded eagerly, almost breathlessly.

"*Oh, August!*" cried Kate Carew, throwing herself into his arms, and bursting into tears.

"She is dead! Musa is dead! Oh, Heaven!" cried the young husband, reeling back.

"No, August! no, darling, no!" exclaimed Kate, sobbing for joy—"she is better. Her fever is broken. She is safe."

Breathing a fervent thanksgiving, August Carew passed into the sick chamber. The window shutters were open, and the windows, draped with their rich, old crimson curtains, admitted a subdued rosy light that filled the room.

August went silently up to the bed-side. The crimson bed-curtains had been looped high to admit fresh air to the invalid. He stooped and looked upon her face. She seemed to be sleeping, but ah, what a blessed change had passed over her.

She now lay quietly upon a smooth and orderly bed, covered with a snow-white counterpane. Her head reposed upon a fresh, dry pillow. The ice-cloths that had wrapped it were now replaced by a dainty lace cap that softly framed in her delicate features. Her face was thin and white, indeed, in contour and color; but serene and tender in expression. Her eyes were closed, and the black lashes lay upon her white cheeks, forming, with the arched and jetty

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eyebrows, a lovely contrast to their whiteness. Her beautiful lips were softly shut, but rosy with the dawn of renewing life. Her fair, transparent fingers were lightly interlaced and lying upon her bosom.

"Is she sleeping?" whispered Mr. Carew, in a scarcely audible voice, addressing Mrs. Shrewsbury, who occupied the easy-chair at the head of the bed.

"No, oh, no; you can speak to her if you wish," replied the old lady, in the same tone.

August did not speak until he stooped and pressed his lips to the calm white forehead of the seeming sleeper.

Musa opened her dark eyes and looked up in a gentle and pleased surprise.

"August? You here, love? They told me you were sleeping, and I would not let them rouse you," she said, slowly and faintly, slipping her thin hand in his.

"Oh, my darling, my darling! I thank Heaven that you are so much better!" answered August, pressing her hand and stooping and kissing her pale red lips.

"Yes, thank Heaven! Did you sleep well, August? Are you rested, dear?" she next inquired.

"I slept well. But the sight of you, so much better, has refreshed me more than sleep," he said, with another gentle caress.

Her next question pained him. After a silence of a few moments she inquired faintly:

"August, have you heard any further details of—*the wreck?*"

"No, love; there was nothing more to hear," he answered gently and gravely.

"There were no—no—no *bodies recovered?*" she asked in a low, hesitating voice.

"No, dear love, none," he replied.

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She sighed softly, and asked no more questions then. August stood by the bed, holding her hand until she fainted off to sleep.

"There, now, you must go and get some breakfast, or we shall have *you* down sick," said Mrs. Shrewsbury, in a low but peremptory tone.

August stooped and lightly touched the sleeper's fair forehead with his lips, and then he turned and obeyed Mrs. Chief-Justice.

When he entered the morning-room, he found Mrs. Kate Carew presiding over a small breakfast-table that had been set for him.

On seeing him, she arose, rang for the coffee and came to meet him.

"August, am I forgiven?" she inquired, putting her hand in his, and looking up into his eyes.

"Madam," he answered gravely and sweetly, "as soon as I had read your confession, I put it in the fire, and said that we would forget it. And now, I have no room for any other sentiment in my heart, but gratitude for our dear Musa's safety."

And he raised the hand she had given him and pressed it to his lips.

"But," she continued, hesitatingly, "will not this affair involve you in great legal embarrassments concerning your own name and estates?"

"No," he replied, gently; "the only person interested in this matter besides ourselves is Colonel Harold Carew——"

"He will never move to annoy you," interrupted Mrs. Carew.

"I presume not, from all I have heard. But that is not the point. His estate must be restored to him. I shall

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write and ask him to come on here, and meet Mr. Lyttleton Locke, whom I shall also invite to Raven Rocks, that we may have a settlement of this difficulty. We can make all necessary arrangements without trouble or publicity."

"But the name you bear—under which you were brought up—under which you were married—by which only you are known?" said Kate Carew, with an anxious look.

"I shall retain the name, and take measures as quickly and as quietly as I can to make it legally my own. And now let us drop the subject," he said.

"Willingly," said Kate Carew, as she rang the bell to have the breakfast service taken away and arose from the table.

Kate had assumed the direction of domestic affairs, so as to leave Mrs. Shrewsbury at liberty to devote herself exclusively to Musa.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

EXCHANGE OF CONFIDENCES AND CHANGE OF PLANS.

Mr. Carew returned to his young wife's chamber. He found Musa still sleeping lightly.

Musa slept a great deal for the next week. She had to make up for about ten days of raging fever, tossing and sleeplessness. Her convalescence was now so rapid as to surprise her medical attendants. Her youth and strong constitution prevailed over all her ills of mind and body.

The seventh day from that on which her fever left her she was able to sit up in the comfortable easy-chair so long occupied in turn by her nurses. And on the fourteenth day she joined the family circle at breakfast and took her first ride out.

She was very much changed; but in her husband's eyes she seemed lovelier than ever. Once she had a rich glowing brunette complexion, with crimson cheeks and crimson lips, and glorious dark eyes flashing with enthusiasm or melting with tenderness—all shaded with luxuriant blue-black ringlets.

She had now a thin face and clear pale complexion, with just a faint tint of color on her lips and with a brooding thoughtfulness in her large dark eyes, as wistful as those of her own little lost Musette. And this lovely face was shaded softly by the fine edge of the dainty lace cap she wore while her beautiful hair was growing.

While she treasured the memory of her angel child deep

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in her heart, she never spoke of her loss, but tried to be happy for the sake of her worshipped husband, and she succeeded, at least in being cheerful.

Mrs. Shrewsbury and Kate Carew intended to remain with her at Raven Rocks until her full restoration to health and strength. Both ladies were devoted to her.

But since Musa's recovery, not a word had been said in her presence regarding the secret family history that had been made known to her just before her illness. She knew that Kate Carew was her mother, but did not by her manner betray her knowledge. She waited for the elder lady to open the subject. And Kate, on her part, refrained from any allusion to it, from a fear of exciting Musa and retarding the progress of her convalescence.

Mr. Carew had written to Colonel Carew and to Mr. Lyttleton Locke, inviting them to come to Raven Rocks early in April.

Musa improved every day, and was able to ride out every morning.

At length one morning, near the end of March, Kate Carew came into Musa's chamber, where she found her seated alone, and looking very pretty and fragile, in her white merino dressing-gown and lace cap, and proposed that they should take a drive in the pony phaeton, Kate to hold the reins. Musa acceded to the proposal, and after they had got into the forest road Kate said:

"I have brought you out here for a purpose, dear Musa. I wished to talk to you alone, secure from interruption. I have something to say to you, dear."

"Say on then, Kate."

"We have not once alluded to our relationship since it was made known to you, Musa," said the elder lady, gravely.

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"But I have thought of it a great deal ever since I heard of it, Kate, dear."

"And I have thought of it ever since it existed."

"And you know, Kate, I loved you from the first time I ever saw you, nearly three years ago."

"And I loved you, darling, from the first time I ever saw you, nearly twenty-one years ago; although I never dared to see you after the first few weeks of your infant life, and never *did* see you until you were between eighteen and nineteen years of age. But, oh, how I longed for you in all those years, Musa," said the lady, sighing.

"Oh, Kate! oh, Kate! how much you must have suffered!" exclaimed Musa, tenderly. And her eyes filled with tears, as she thought of her own little lost Musette, and of all *she* had suffered in the separation from her child. "Oh, Kate, how could you bear it?"

"I had to bear that, or to bear worse: grinding poverty for us both. I chose the lighter evil of the two. Yet *you* can never know how hard the trial was," she added.

"Oh, yes, I can, Kate, better than you think."

"You still call me Kate," said the lady, with a smile.

"Yes, dear. It comes natural," said Musa, turning suddenly and kissing her beautiful mother. "I hope it doesn't displease you," she added, apologetically.

"Oh, not at all," answered the gay widow, as she returned the caress. "I rather like it—only it is odd. But that is not what I brought you out here to talk about. I had something else to tell you."

"Tell it then, Kate."

"You are aware that Colonel Carew and myself are engaged to be married?"

"Yes; and I wish you both all manner of happiness."

"You do not dislike the idea of the marriage?"

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"Oh, no, indeed! I like it, because I think you will be happier."

"Well, but August *does* dislike it."

"Has he told you so?"

"No; but I can read his thoughts."

"He only objects on account of the Old Harry's despotic temper. He thinks he will tyrannize over you," said Musa.

Here Kate broke into such a sudden explosion of laughter that the white filly started and ran a quarter of a mile before she could be pulled up.

"There!" exclaimed Kate, recovering her breath. "You are no longer an interesting invalid, Musa. You cannot be, you know. You have just uttered the richest joke of the season. Old Harry tyrannize over me! *Anybody* tyrannize over ME! Look, you darling! Among the opprobrious epithets flung at me in my youth was that of 'the handsome horse-breaker.' I have not lost the cunning of my hand in middle age. But, oh, what is there in the breaking of the most vicious brute that ever kicked and trampled his rider to death equal to the excitement of taming that old lion, who has killed two women already! It will be glorious! It will form all the employment and interest of my declining years!"

"Oh, Kate! to enter upon your married life with such thoughts as these!" said Musa, gravely.

Again the widow's ringing laugh burst out upon the air. And again the sensitive white filly started; but Kate had a firm hold upon the reins and kept her from running away.

"Fiddle-de-dee, my dear! You and I look at life from different points of view. You and I, who are so much alike *ex*ternally, have very little in common *in*ternally. You are the true daughter of old Peter Carew, who used

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to say that love was religion, and marriage Heaven, or something akin to it. I 'm a Shrewsbury; of the earth, earthy; of the world, worldly; of myself, selfish."

"Kate, I would not allow any one else to say that of you."

"I presume not. It is the truth for all that. But *that* was not what I brought you out to talk about either. It seems as if I never should get to the point," complained the widow, pettishly, though laughing.

"Try, Kate," suggested Musa, dryly.

"Well, then, I got a letter from Colonel Carew last night, and he will be at Raven Rocks to-morrow evening."

"I shall be very glad to see him," said Musa, cordially.

"Thanks, dear. You know I really have no other home to invite him to," said the lady, apologetically.

"Oh, Kate! as if this were not as much your home as it is mine or August's," said Musa, affectionately.

"You are very kind to say so, dear. And now I am really afraid I shall startle you; but, as I have no other home but this—well, we think of being married here—next Tuesday."

"So soon! That does really startle me!" said Musa, in surprise. "So very soon!"

"Yes, dear, but you see the Colonel very naturally complains that he has not as much time to lose now as he had when he was twenty," said the widow, archly.

"No, to be sure," assented Musa. "Now, Kate," she added, smiling, "I must get well immediately and make ready for the wedding, dear."

"You will do nothing of the sort. You may get well as soon as you please—the sooner the better; but you shall make no fuss over our wedding. I prefer that it shall be a very quiet one—so does the Colonel. I like display on

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most occasions, but I should not like it on this particular one. After the wedding I intend to make up for this moderation by every conceivable extravagance."

"If the Colonel will permit you," said Musa, mischievously.

"If the Colonel will permit me! That's a good one! Why, Musa, I intend to atone for every fault of my life by reforming that fine old family despot! I really like the Old Harry so much that I shall quite enjoy polishing him off. And now here we are 'out of the woods,'" said Kate, as they emerged upon the road that ran along between the foot of the mountain and the edge of the forest. "Shall we follow this road now, that will take us around to the rear of the park, or shall we turn back and go the way we came?"

"We will follow this road," said Musa.

"All right," said Kate, and she touched up the white filly, and they set off at a spanking rate for the manor house, where they arrived in time for luncheon.

"This drive through the free air has done you good, Musa. You have more color than when you set out. I feel better, too; there is a load off my mind," said Kate, as she drew up before the door and threw the reins to old Cornwallis, who had come to take charge of the horse and chaise.

Kate stepped from her low seat and handed Musa out.

"You will have to tell Mrs. Shrewsbury. She does not like to be surprised by the sudden arrival of a visitor, much less by one who is on the point of marrying one of the ladies of the family," said Musa, as they entered the house together.

"Oh, Aunt Shrewsbury knows all about the Colonel's expected visit and what he is coming for. I told her last

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night. August knows all about it too. I told him this morning. He referred me to you. And now here we are at your chamber-door. You must lie down and take some rest before luncheon. I will send Cassy to you," said Kate, as she left Musa at her room-door.

Notwithstanding Kate's prohibition, some preparations were made to receive the old bridegroom. And the next day, when the hour of his arrival approached, the carriage was sent to meet him at the Raven Inn, Eyrie.

Even Musa, for the first time since her illness, announced her intention to sit up and spend the evening with the family in the drawing-room.

She put on an evening dress of white crape, trimmed with black ribbons. This was all the mourning she dared to wear in memory of her lost darling.

When Old Harry arrived, he came in like a hurricane, not of wrath but of boisterous delight. Mr. Carew came out from the library on the opposite side of the hall, to welcome him.

"How do you do? How do you do? So glad to get here at last! So glad to hear from your servants that Cousin Musa is better! Fine place this *of yours!* Never saw it before!" exclaimed Old Harry, impetuously shaking hands with his host before the latter could utter one word of salutation.

"Will you walk into the drawing-room, or would you rather go up to your own room first?" hospitably inquired August.

"Oh, my dear fellow, up to my own room first! And please send my boy Sim with my valise after me. I am spattered all over with mud, and shall not be presentable to the ladies until I have changed my dress," exclaimed the old bridegroom expectant.

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"Then I will show you the way. Follow me, if you please, Colonel. Come, boy."

Half an hour later the Old Harry came down, transfigured into an old dandy, in black swallow-tailed coat, lavender pants, lavender neck-tie, lavender gloves and fine linen, with his fiery-red shock of hair and beard, trimmed, oiled and brushed into civilization and decorum, and—if you will believe me—a bunch of white violets in his buttonhole.

The ladies in the drawing-room arose to receive this elegant apparition, scarcely recognizing it as the Old Harry.

"How do you do, Cousin Musa? So glad to see you looking so well after your illness. Fine old place this of yours, my dear. Good-evening, Mrs. Shrewsbury. By-gones are by-gones between you and me, eh? Yes! Well, fine old place this of our young friends, eh? How are you, Cousin Kate? You are looking remarkably well, my beautiful cousin. Fine old place this of your son's and daughter's, eh? Hope they, and their children after them, will live long to enjoy it, eh?" exclaimed the Old Harry, storming on without waiting for any one to answer a question or an exclamation.

"Will you take a seat, Colonel?" inquired Mr. Carew, drawing a large arm-chair forward.

"Thank you, sir," said the Old Harry, as he sat down. "Magnificent old place this of yours!"

Every one for whom these iterated praises were uttered knew well what they meant—that the old man wished to let them know distinctly he had not come to take possession of his property, and did not mean at any time, or under any circumstances, to set up any claim to it.

"I am very glad you like Raven Rocks so well, Colonel.

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And I quite agree with you in your opinion of it," answered August Carew.

At this moment the old-fashioned folding-doors were thrown open, and Pendragon, in his capacity of butler, announced supper in the old-time phrase: "Madam is served."

Old Harry was on his very best behavior. Not even for love would he forget etiquette. So he arose, bowed and gave his arm to his hostess, to take her in to supper. Mr. Carew followed with Mrs. Shrewsbury. And Kate walked on independently, unescorted. Love had not hurt the old man's appetite. He did more than justice to the good things set before him.

After supper the party returned to the drawing-room, where they sat for half an hour, listening to Old Harry's account of his journey.

And then, as the young hostess was not yet fully recovered, and as the traveller showed signs of fatigue, Kate took the responsibility of breaking up the party.

On the evening of the next day, Mr. Lyttleton Locke arrived from Washington City. And on the following day, being Saturday, the three gentlemen—Colonel Carew, Mr. Carew, and Mr. Locke—spent the forenoon in the library, in consultation over certain deeds and other documents.

But when the question of transferring the Raven Rocks estate to its legal proprietor came, Old Harry jumped up and stormed. He swore by all the demons in and out of an unmentionable place, that he would never say, or do, or sign, or seal anything whatever—no, and he wouldn't have anything *served on him*, he wouldn't accept anything signed and sealed by any one else, that went to put old Peter Carew's daughter and son-in-law off of old Peter Carew's estate! And he called down all unmentionable maledic-

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tions on his head and his eyes and his life and his soul, if he did. And he swore by multitudinous fiends that he considered the proposition an insult to his integrity. And he clasped his hands firmly behind his back lest somebody should force some deed into them, and put him in possession of Ravens Rocks, whether he would or no.

"But, my good sir," said the lawyer, "all this is perfectly gratuitous. Nothing need be 'signed, sealed and delivered,' as you are pleased to call it, to give you Raven Rocks. It is yours already, whether you claim it or not."

"I will never claim it so long as I live!" said Old Harry, with a terrible oath.

"Then of course you can leave our young friends in possession as long as you live," acquiesced the lawyer.

"And who will have the right or the power to take it away from them after I am gone? That 's what I want to know?" bawled Old Harry.

"The heir-at-law, whoever he may prove to be," very coolly replied the old lawyer.

"Set fire to him, whoever he may be!" hotly exclaimed the Old Harry. "But I don't believe there 's any such a person. There!"

"Pardon me, Colonel Carew," said August, gravely, "but there *is* such a person. And the time has now come when I must speak of him. Your son, Harold——"

"Ah! the poor, self-willed fellow!" interrupted the old man, with much emotion. "You are thinking of *him*, are you? Dead a dozen years ago, sir! Dead a dozen years ago, or else he would have answered some one of the many advertisements I had put in the papers inviting him to come home. You may put him out of your calculations, sir. He 'll never come back to this world to deprive you of Raven Rocks. Dead a dozen years ago, sir. Dead a

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dozen years ago or more!" added the bereaved father, with a deep sigh.

Mr. Carew and Mr. Locke were both so touched by this betrayal of feeling on the part of Old Harry that they kept silence for a while. But the impetuous old man soon recommenced:

"Ah, poor boy! poor boy! That temper of his was his ruin, sir!—that self-willed, headstrong, violent and ungovernable temper of his! I can't think *where* he got that temper from, I'm sure. Certainly not from *me*. But, there! He is dead and gone now, poor fellow! And there's an end of him!" he added, vigorously wiping his face with his pocket-handkerchief.

"It is true," said August, solemnly. "Young Harold Carew died years ago, before he saw one of your advertisements inviting him to return home. But—he left a widow and a child. And the future heir of Raven Rocks lives in your grandson, Colonel Carew."

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CHAPTER XXIX.

GLAD TIDINGS FOR OLD HARRY—A STRANGER.

"I SAY that the future heir of Raven Rocks survives in your grandson, Colonel Carew," repeated August, seeing that the old man only sat and stared stupidly in his face, as if he had not comprehended what had been said.

"EH? WHAT! Lord bless my soul alive!" exclaimed the Old Harry, breaking out of his stupor. "Where is the boy? How did you find this out? How long have you known it? Can you prove it? Why didn't you let me know before? Gracious Heaven, man! why didn't you tell me all this years ago? Where has the boy been all this time? Is his mother living? What sort of a woman is she? Where do they live? What are their circumstances? Are they in want? When can I see the lad? How old is he? How has he been brought up? Heaven and earth, man! why don't you answer?" fiercely demanded Old Harry, after pouring forth a torrent of questions in his usual impetuous way, until he had to stop for want of breath.

"I will tell you all that I know at once, Colonel Carew, and I should have done so before if you had given me an opportunity," said August.

"Go on, sir! Go on! Thunder and lightning, why don't you go on!"

"I am going," said August, smiling at the old man's vehement impatience. "I discovered the existence of

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your grandson but a few weeks ago, and by the merest accident."

"Providence, sir! Special Providence, sir! Go on," interrupted Colonel Carew.

"Providence, then. I stand corrected," smiled August, "His mother is a good woman, the wife now of the Rev. Mr. Wilks, a Methodist preacher."

"The jade! to marry a second time and put a step-father over my grandson!" exclaimed Old Harry, very consistently with his own matrimonial proceedings, past and present.

"They live at Inwood-on-the-Hudson, and are in moderate circumstances," continued Mr. Carew, heedless of the interruption.

"But the boy, sir! the boy! let us hear about the boy! Who the deuce cares about the woman and the parson!" exclaimed Old Harry.

"The boy is a healthy, intelligent lad, very much like the Carews in person and in character; with a strong will of his own."

"Never was a Carew without one, sir! Never!"

"He is between ten and twelve years of age; and, like his father before him, he has run away to sea."

"'Run away to sea!' Lord bless my soul alive! 'run away to sea!' He too!" burst forth Old Harry, starting from his chair, and beginning to trot up and down the floor, and wipe the beading perspiration from his face.

"I do not think you need to distress yourself on that account, sir," said Mr. Carew, soothingly.

"In the name of Heaven, then, where, where, where is the lad? How can he be reached?" exclaimed the old man, stopping in his vehement walk and standing before the last speaker.

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"He is probably safe and in good hands. He is known to have sailed with Captain Orr of the merchant ship *Banshee*, trading between New York and Liverpool. Captain Orr is known to the boy's mother as a just and kind man, a friend of the boy's father, who sailed as second mate on the *Banshee* for several years. The *Banshee* sailed from New York about two months ago, and is probably now near port, on her homeward-bound voyage," Mr. Carew explained.

Old Harry wiped his red and steaming face again and exclaimed:

"I must go to New York immediately to look up my grandson, the heir of Pirate's Peak. I will take Kate to New York for our wedding trip, and wait there until the —the—the what 's-its-name—the *Banshee* comes in, and then I 'll take the lad and fetch him home."

"You 'll go to Inwood and see his mother, I suppose?" said Mr. Carew.

"Well, yes, I suppose I must, though I don't care about the jade—to go and marry a second time, and put a step-father over my grandson! What do you say the fellow's name was she went and married—Weeks?—Peake?—what was it?"

"Wilks—the Rev. Mr. Wilks, a Methodist preacher."

"I know him—a meddlesome ourang outang—tried to make mischief between me and Cousin Kate before I ever saw her face, with a cock and a bull story, enough to make your hair stand on end. I know him! Set fire to him! No wonder the boy ran away to sea. I would have done the same thing myself," growled Old Harry. "And now, sir, of course you have proofs of what you have told me."

"Certainly; I brought them with me from New York. I will give them to you immediately," said Mr. Carew, as

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he arose and unlocked a drawer in the library table, and drew from it a parcel which he handed to Colonel Carew.

"And now let all else go by for the present. I don't care a copper cent what becomes of Raven Rocks, but I *do* care for my grandson; and I want to look over these documents alone at my leisure, and in my own room. So if you will excuse me, gentlemen, I will go."

Old Harry shut himself up in his room, until he had read all the letters and other documents relating to the case of his grandson, and had stared at all the photographs to his eyes' content, and had satisfied himself as to the genuineness and authenticity of the whole mass of proofs, and then he came out and went in search of his betrothed. He found her in the sitting-room, where, as soon as he was seated, he burst forth with the whole truth.

"I have just found out that I have got a living grandson, Kate, the son of my poor willful Harry who ran away to sea so many years ago. He married and died, leaving a widow and one child, my grandson, who will be the heir of Pirate's Peak. I thought it right to tell you so, Kate, and to tell you, also, that your prospects shall not be injured by the unexpected circumstance of my grandson's existence. Pirate's Peak is not entailed as Raven Rocks unfortunately is. So you shall be richly provided for, my love, and shall have a life's interest in Pirate's Peak after my decease."

"Don't talk about your decease, my dear old lion. But tell me about the boy. Where is he?" inquired the widow.

"On board of a ship, expected every day to land at New York. And if it is agreeable to you, my dear, instead of going South for our wedding trip, we will go North and fetch home the boy. What do you say?"

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"I would prefer going North under any circumstances, and very much prefer it under these," answered the lady.

"Thank you, Kate."

And so the matter was settled.

The wedding was a very quiet one. There was no display in dress.

Kate was married in a neat travelling suit of gray Irish poplin, trimmed with velvet of the same quiet shade, and a bonnet of silver-gray silk, with a gray ostrich tip and a single tea-rose, and white gloves.

Mrs. August Carew wore a black silk, half covered with a fine white thread-lace shawl, a white rose in her dark hair, and white gloves.

Mrs. Shrewsbury wore a black satin dress, black lace shawl, point-lace cap and lavender gloves. Mrs. Rollins, a friend from Eyrie, wore a mauve silk walking suit, with bonnet and gloves to match.

The bridegroom wore the regulation dress in such cases made and provided.

After an elegant little breakfast, at which the officiating clergyman, his wife, and the family solicitor, were the only guests, the newly-married pair bade adieu to their friends, and entered the carriage that had been ordered to convey them to Eyrie, to meet the coach that was to take them the first stage on their journey northward.

On the following day, Mrs. Shrewsbury left Raven Rocks for the Shoals, to attend her daughter Clarice. Mr. Lyttleton Locke escorted the old lady as far as Washington, where she took the steamer for the Chesapeake Bay.

Mr. and Mrs. August Carew remained at Raven Rocks for some weeks longer, in order to settle up their business there before leaving the place. For August had determined, notwithstanding all Colonel Carew had said to

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the contrary, that he would give up Raven Rocks. And he therefore made arrangements with the land-steward, Bullock, to receive all the revenues of the estate and pay them over to Mr. Lyttleton Locke, who was to put them into bank to the credit of Colonel Harold Carew, of Pirate's Peak.

They had in all this time heard nothing more of the wreck. The waters of forgetfulness had seemed to close over the tragedy as the waves of the ocean had closed over the sunken ship.

Mr. Carew had written to the detective at Liverpool, recalling him and Mrs. Wilks from their vain waiting there.

Musa received long and frequent letters from Kate. The newly-married pair were in New York, waiting for the arrival of the *Banshee,* which was daily expected. From New York they intended to come down to Pirate's Peak.

At length, about the first of May, all their work at Raven Rocks being done, Mr. and Mrs. Carew, accompanied by their servants, Cornwallis and Cassy, left for Washington, *en route* for Bay Beauty.

The bright little bay, the Isle of Roses on its bosom, the verdant banks around it, the wooded hill and vine-clad villa at its head, were all as beautiful as the floral month of May could make them. There at Cape Welcome a surprise awaited them.

Commodore Howard, Mrs. Shrewsbury, Colonel Carew and Kate, stood on the pier to meet them.

"This is indeed a very unexpected pleasure," said August, as he shook hands right and left in response to their cordial greetings.

"Why, I am surprised and delighted to meet you here, Kate—dear Kate!" said Musa, as soon as she had shaken

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hands with the elder members of this receiving committee.

"We have been here three days, my darling," answered Mrs. Carew.

"But when I received a letter from you just before I left Raven Rocks, you were still in New York, awaiting the arrival of the *Banshee*, with little Sam on board. She arrived, of course? But the boy—did you bring the boy back with you?" inquired Musa, as they all walked up the avenue, between rows of fragrant, flowering almond trees.

"The *Banshee* came in six days since, dear, but the boy was not on board of her. It seems that he had shipped only for the voyage out, and he left the ship at Liverpool," said Kate.

"The little vagabond!" burst forth the Old Harry—"to give me all this trouble! But I have sent an officer over after him in the steamer that sailed Saturday. The little outlaw! *I'll* train him once I get hold of him! *I'll* learn him how to run away!"

"Come here, my dear, I have got something to tell you," said Mrs. 'Shrewsbury, drawing Musa's arm within her own, and dropping a little behind the party, so that they could be *tête-à-tête*.

"And I have got something to ask you, dear Mrs. Shrewsbury—How is Clarice?" whispered Musa.

"Oh, she is doing finely! And—congratulate me, my dear. I am a grandfather."

"A grandfather!" burst forth Musa, in amazement.

"Oh, I mean a grandmother. But it *is* a boy, a very fine boy, indeed. Just one week old to-day. And that's how I made the slip of the tongue," the old lady explained.

"I am so glad! I *do* congratulate you, very sincerely indeed. And my dear Clarice! She is doing well, you say?"

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"She is doing finely. And the baby is a noble boy. And she means to name him after you."

"To name him after me!"

"Yes, my dear, for she adores you. There is not a creature living who loves you more devotedly than Clarice does."

"I know she does, dear child. But—name a boy after me!"

"Yes, my dear. If it had been a girl she would have called her Musa. But as it is a boy she will call him Percy—Percy Howard. It will be a very pretty name."

"Yes, a very pretty name," said Musa, with an involuntary sigh.

"And she wants you and Mr. Carew to stand sponsors for the boy when he is christened. And she is very anxious to see you. I hope you will go over to see her as soon as possible."

"I will go over to-morrow morning, dear Mrs. Shrewsbury."

"Thank you, my love. Well, here we are at the house."

The house looked very bright and cheerful. The evening lamps were lighted, though it was quite early. The doors and windows were all open, and the light from within streamed out upon the beautiful piazza.

Musa found her trunks and boxes already in her room, under the charge of Cassy. She changed her travelling suit for an evening dress of fine India muslin, trimmed with black ribbon; put a white rose in her dark hair, and went below to join her friends.

After supper the party adjourned to the piazza, to enjoy the lovely starlight night upon the waters.

There was a late moon, and the visitors waited for it to rise, that they might have its light upon the bay as they

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went home in their boats. At ten o'clock the moon arose over the waters, clear, serene, and majestic.

The visitors prepared for their departure, and notwithstanding the urgent entreaty of their host and hostess that they should remain for the night, they pleaded necessity and left the house.

Early the next morning, Musa came out upon the piazza and looked upon the scene, all-glorious in the light of the newly-risen sun; her spirit expanded in joy and in worship for a moment, and then, quickly as the coming of a summer shower, she burst into tears.

"Oh, my little Musette! Oh, my lost child! How happy you would have been here! How happy you would have made us!" she exclaimed, as she dropped into one of the rustic seats, and abandoned herself to the storm of grief that swept over her soul, thankful that for once she could weep unobserved and unrestrained—thankful that her husband had gone on a tour of inspection through the place, and would not be back until breakfast time.

When the tempest had subsided and left her calmer, she went down among the parterres of flowers below the house and gathered a bouquet of scarlet geraniums, hearts-ease, heliotrope, cape jessamine, clove pinks, tuberoses and other beautiful and fragrant flowers, and brought them in and put them in a vase and set them on the breakfast table.

August came in bright, healthy and hungry from his morning ride. Musa rang for breakfast, and they sat down at the table.

"When we met here a year ago, August, I welcomed you to my house; now you must welcome me to yours," said Musa, with a smile.

"What is this, my darling, about 'mine' and 'yours,'

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'yours' and 'mine'? There are no such pronouns for us —only *ours*," said August, heartily.

"I promised to go down and see Clarice and her baby this morning. Can you take me in the sail-boat, August?" she next asked.

"Of course; I have already ordered the boat. So if you have got through breakfast, my love, you may go and put on your hat," said August.

Musa rang the bell for a servant to come and clear away, and then she arose and went up-stairs to get ready for her sail. She soon returned, wearing a broad-brimmed straw hat and a white beaver cloth sack, and doeskin gauntlets.

An hour's delightful sail brought them to the low sandy beach known as "The Shoals," above which, on a gently undulated green lawn, shaded with acacia trees, stood the old-fashioned homestead of the Howards, with its tall chimneys at each gable-end, its steep roof and its long front piazzas, above and below.

Captain Howard was on the piazza, and he came down to welcome the morning visitors.

"I wish you much joy of your young son, Captain," said Mr. Carew, cordially shaking his hand, when the first formal greetings were over.

Horace Howard murmured some polite but rather inarticulate expressions of acknowledgment.

He looked very happy but very much embarrassed, for he was a young father, and not yet quite accustomed to his paternal honors.

But he invited his visitors into the parlor, where Mrs. Shrewsbury received them very cordially.

"Come up and see Clarice. She is so anxiously expecting you," said Mrs. Shrewsbury to Musa, as she led the way to Clarice's room.

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"Oh, I am so glad to see you, Musa! my own dear Queen Musa! How long it has been since we met!" sobbed Clarice, kissing her friend amid tears of delight.

"Yes, it has been nearly five months, dear," said Musa, returning her caresses. "And now let me see the little 'crown prince.' Who is he like?" inquired Musa, bending over the miniature man.

"He is like no one but his angel self. What young baby just seven days from Heaven ever was really like father or mother, or any earthly sinner?" said Clarice, as she uncovered her treasure to the admiring eyes of her friend.

Musa lavished praises without measure upon this small pearl of great price. And then, in the midst of her half-jesting flatteries, she suddenly became very grave. Tears filled her eyes as she said seriously:

"Oh, take care of him, Clarice! Guard his life as you never guarded your own! For of all the heart-breaking sorrows in this world, the loss of a child is the greatest, except those which come from sin."

"Indeed I will take care of him, bless him!" said the young mother, earnestly, as she bent and kissed her child. "But what makes you talk so, dear Musa? Indeed you alarm me! Do you think he looks delicate?" she anxiously inquired.

"No, love, no! he looks fine and strong, and likely to live to be a handsome old man of sixty, when you are a lovely little old lady of eighty," said Musa, cheerfully.

And then, to turn the conversation, she inquired:

"Do you know anything about Armida Sutton, Clarice? It has been four months since I heard from her."

"Armida! Why, don't you know what has become of her, Musa?" inquired Clarice, in surprise.

"No, dear. As I told you before, I have not heard from her for months."

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"Well, then, she has run off to Europe with that Prussian Count, Von Ernheim."

"What!" exclaimed Musa, in amazement.

"Don't you remember that dandy demon, Count Von Ernheim, who was an attaché to the Prussian embassy, and used to come to our receptions at Vermont Avenue, where Armida used to flirt with him in her cold, stately manner?"

"Certainly!"

"Well, he is the man. He was recalled by his government, or dismissed by his chief, or something. At all events, he went back to Europe and took Armida with him. Some say as his wife, some say as his travelling companion."

"Gracious Heaven, Clarice! How do you know? Who told you?"

"Mollie Seymour. You remember her? She was one of your 'Maries' at the masked ball. And I have corresponded with her ever since I left Washington."

"But Armida's poor mother! What about her?" anxiously inquired Musa.

"Mollie Seymour, good little girl that she is, went out to see Mrs. Sutton, after the elopement. She found her in poor health and deep destitution, yet withal, quite reconciled to being deserted, and quite proud of her daughter's being a countess, as the poor woman firmly believed her to be."

"And as she probably *is*," said Musa. "Armida Sutton is not too pure and good, but she is far too cold and selfish to sacrifice herself for love."

"Well, at all events, she has gone and left her mother alone in poverty and sickness," said Clarice.

"My poor foster-mother! I must write to her and send

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relief this very day. And I will ask her to come down here and live with me. She can rent out or sell her wretched little farm, which in her hands has never paid expenses," said Musa.

Then thinking that she had staid as long with Clarice as prudence dictated, she arose and kissed her good-bye, promising to come again in a few days.

As soon as Musa reached home, she sat down and wrote an affectionate letter to Mrs. Sutton, pressing her to come down to Bay Beauty, and inclosing a check to meet her expenses. This kind letter was answered sooner than Musa could have hoped, by the appearance of Mrs. Sutton in person.

She arrived by the morning boat, about the middle of May. She looked pale and emaciated, but by no means depressed. She told Musa that she had rented out her farm, and would be glad to remain at Bay Beauty as housekeeper until she would hear from her daughter. Musa kissed her in silence. She could make no comment on this speech.

But, to Musa's surprise, in a few days after the arrival of Mrs. Sutton at Bay Beauty, a foreign letter arrived for her that had been forwarded from Rockville by the tenant of Harewood. It was a letter from her daughter, inclosing a bill of exchange for a considerable sum of money, and signed ARMIDA VON ERNHEIM. The poor forsaken mother was delighted and grieved at the same time, and she expressed these mixed sentiments when she said to Musa:

"You see, my dear lady, it is a great match my daughter has made. But, of course, it separates her from me. My education has not fitted me to move in the high circle that she will adorn."

So Mrs. Sutton remained with Musa as the housekeeper at Bay Beauty.

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Pretty Clarice Howard was soon able to leave her room. And the first visit that she made was to her best-beloved friend Musa.

The summer and autumn passed pleasantly to the colony of friends on the bay-side. The life there was calm and beautiful, and would have been delightful to Musa but for one drawback. Musa deeply and secretly mourned her child, and could not be comforted, even by the prospect of being the mother of another one.

When the time approached at which they should have migrated to Washington for the fashionable season, Musa pleaded to be allowed to spend the winter at Bay Beauty. With the memory of her lost child in her heart, she could not endure the thought of entering upon a season of fashionable gayety and dissipation. And Mr. Carew, who would not at that time refuse her anything, consented to remain at Bay Beauty.

The winter passed away, and spring came again, reviving the life and beauty of all nature, and teaching again the glorious lesson of the resurrection. And on one beautiful morning in May, as Musa lay faint and white after a night of suffering, another lovely infant girl was laid upon her bosom—a golden-haired, azure-eyed, lily-fair Percie.

Musa clasped it to her heart, kissed it and blessed it, and then suddenly covered her face with both hands and burst into tears and sobs, moaning:

"Oh, my child! my child! Oh, my meek darling! my first born! my little lost Musette!"

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CHAPTER XXX.

ADVENTURES OF LITTLE MUSETTE.

We must follow the fortunes of the child, Musette.

Perhaps there was something to palliate, though not to excuse, the act of Mary Morris, in abducting, for love, the little daughter of Musa Percie.

Mary Morris was of English parentage, and had been an orphan from her early childhood. She had been brought up by an uncle and aunt, who being blessed with but few shillings and many children, had but little, either of money or of love, to bestow on their orphan niece. They kept a little ale-house in a narrow street down near the docks at Liverpool, and frequented by sailors. It was there Mary grew up and became a barmaid.

And there she first met Richard Morris, the American sailor, whom she eventually married. It was a sudden marriage between two impulsive young people, inspired by some mutual liking, but by no deep or permanent affection.

When Richard's ship, the U. S. sloop-of-war *Plymouth*, was ordered home, his young wife followed him to New York in the emigrant ship *Liberator*.

But Dick never remained longer in port than he could help. He was a "natural-born" sailor, and the sea was his first and last and only real love.

So when the *Plymouth* was paid off, the term of his enlistment being out, he shipped himself on board the U. S.

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frigate *Independence,* bound for the Cape of Good Hope and the East Coast of Africa.

Then he generously gave his young wife the whole of his money, tenderly kissed her good-bye, and gayly left her alone in a strange land, and within a few weeks of her expected confinement.

Mary Morris cried a good deal for the first few hours, and then consoled herself by going out shopping and spending money rather recklessly.

Her baby came in due time, a little boy, who only breathed the air of this world and then passed away. Mary Morris cried a great deal more over this disappointment than she did over the departure of her husband. She was a simple-minded, affectionate creature, a Christian in faith if not always in practice, and she knew her baby was in heaven, and she thought she could be reconciled if she only had another baby.

It was then that Mrs. Duff, the good woman with whom she boarded, advised her to seek a situation as wet-nurse. Seeing Musa Percie's carefully disguised advertisement, she answered it in person, and was engaged, as has been related, to take charge of the little Musette, then but a few weeks old.

She took the lovely babe to her bosom and to her heart, and soon lavished upon it all the idolatrous love that she would have bestowed upon her own child, and infinitely more than she had ever given to any other creature, even to her handsome, careless, sailor bridegroom.

And little Musette soon gave love for love without measure, "heaped up and overflowing." And the beautiful babe and her blooming nurse became, in household phrase, "all the world to one another."

And when a year had passed away, and the time ap-

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proached when the little Musette must be weaned, the young nurse became painfully alarmed lest the babe should be taken from her. So great was her anxiety on this subject, that it forced her to speak of it to the child's mother.

And then it was that Musa, sympathizing with poor Mollie's feelings, gave her the rash promise that the child whom she had nourished at her own bosom, and whom she loved so devotedly, should never be separated from her, but that wherever little Musette should be taken, Mollie Morris should go, if she should choose to do so, either as her nurse or as her maid.

This promise Musa had really and literally forgotten, almost as soon as it was given. But Mary Morris remembered it distinctly, and trusted to it implicitly.

And so when, one Saturday morning, early in January, she was called into the small parlor and informed by Mrs. Wilks that the little Musette's mother was just married to a gentleman named Carew, and that the pair were going to Europe by the next Saturday's steamer, and intended to take the young child with them and leave her nurse behind, Mollie's rage, grief and despair were boundless.

In vain Mrs. Wilks reasoned with her, reminding her that the child belonged not to her, but to the mother.

Mollie's tears "turned to sparks of fire" as she answered that bringing an unwelcome babe into the world against her will didn't make a mother—that love and care and nursing and devotion made a mother, and that she herself, Mollie Morris, had been "a million times more of a mother to the half-forsaken babe than its real mother had ever been."

And that night Mollie first conceived the idea of abducting the child.

"It almost broke my poor heart whenever she would

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come and take my baby away from me for a night, and I know it will kill me *dead* if she takes her away forever. Forever, forever! Oh!" and with the word she fell into strong hysterics, and had them all to herself.

Mollie came out of this fit with the resolution to run away with the baby. She at once began to make preparations for flight, and carried out her plans with consummate skill. She fled to Boston, as a preliminary movement to going to England. She wanted to put the broad ocean between herself and any chance of discovery. She meant to go back to Liverpool to the little ale-house kept by her aunt and uncle, and resume her old place as barmaid there until she should meet her husband again. She meant to tell her relations, and her husband also, in case she should ever meet him, that Musette was her own child—the child that she had been expecting when he left her to go on that African cruise. And as the child's age corresponded with that of the one she had lost, her story would be plausible enough to be accepted without the least suspicion. No one could contradict her, and so the beautiful child should be hers forever.

It was on the morning of the 20th of January, that Mollie, in looking over the shipping news of a paper, saw that the bark *Fairy*, Captain Lloyd, was appointed to sail for Liverpool on the 26th. She immediately went down to the agent and engaged passage. On the morning that the vessel was to sail, Mollie went down to the pier where the *Fairy* lay, and went on board in the midst of the great bustle that always attends the clearing.

She thought she would not go below to her berth until the ship was off. She was interested in the busy scene on deck, and besides, she now felt comparatively safe.

She felt that she had covered all her tracks so that she

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never could be traced and pursued. And though her conscience troubled her a little, she stifled it and triumphed in what she supposed to be her secure possession of the child. At length the last freight was taken on and stowed away in the hold, and the hatches were fastened down.

The officers and crew were preparing to make sail. And friends who had come to see passengers off were taking their last leave. Hasty kisses were given, hasty last words spoken, and a great crowd moved toward the gang-plank; and Mollie was rejoicing in the immediate prospect of getting off to sea, when she felt a hand laid upon her shoulder, and heard a voice say close to her ear:

"Why, Mary Morris! Is it yourself, lass?"

Mollie started, looked up, and turned deadly white with terror. There before her stood the most intimate acquaintance she had in New York, outside of the Brown Cottage —Mrs. Duff, the woman with whom she had lived previous to engaging as the nurse of Musa Percie's child.

Mrs. Duff had visited Mollie frequently, both at Harlem and at Inwood, and was consequently perfectly well acquainted both with the nurse and the child. Mollie was so panic-stricken at the sight of this woman, that she could not speak nor take her eyes from the face.

"Why, Mary, lass, what 's the matter with you? What makes you glare at me as if I was a ghost? And what are you doing here with that child? And, oh, to be sure! Don't you know as there 's a reward——"

"ALL ASHORE!" bawled a peremptory voice from the poop.

"Good Lord alive! I shall be carried away!" cried Mrs. Duff, in alarm, suddenly breaking off from her new-found acquaintance, and hurrying to the side of the ship, and rushing on to the pier just a second before the gang-plank was withdrawn.

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She stood panting on the pier. And before she could recover her breath, the sails filled, and the doomed ship glided away to sea.

Mrs. Duff remained on the pier, gazing after the ship until it was out of sight.

"To think of my coming across Mary Morris and the child on the deck of the *Fairy* this morning! And she been advertised for, with such a reward offered, for the last month or more! If I 'd a been a little sooner, I might a had her stopped and made my own fortune. Anyway, I can give information now and get something handsome, if not the whole reward. Lor', how lucky I went on board to see my nevvy and his wife off to the old country! Now I 'll go right away and find out all I can about her, and then I 'll go back to York and get the money. My duty too! A thieving jade! to go and carry off her missis's child! I wonder what she thinks she 's gwine to do with it, now she 's got it?"

So cogitating, Mrs. Duff turned away from the pier and bent her steps toward the agent's office, and asked to look at the list of passengers who had gone out.

The obliging agent showed it to her, but there was no such name in it as Mary Morris.

"She 's gone under some other name, as I might a known she would, but she 's gone," said Mrs. Duff, to herself, as she thanked the agent and left the office.

She went down to New York by the night's train. And the next morning she put herself in communication with the advertisers, or rather with their representatives, Messrs. Wilks and Ferret. She received half the reward down, with the promise of the other half as soon as Mary Morris and Musette should be actually recovered.

And on the next day Detective Ferret and Mrs. Wilks,

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after communicating the facts to Mr. and Mrs. Carew by letter, embarked on the *Darien* for Liverpool, to intercept the *Fairy* and recover the child, as has been already told.

Mary Morris remained panic-stricken on the deck where she had been so suddenly discovered and so abruptly left by Mrs. Duff. Paralyzed by the sense of the peril she had just passed through, she sat staring stupidly at the receding piers crowded with people, among whom she saw as in a haze the burly form of Mrs. Duff still watching her.

Feeling sure that Mrs. Duff would report the discovery of herself and Musette on board the *Fairy*, Mollie left the vessel at Halifax, although she had paid her passage to Liverpool.

Mollie, under the name of Nelson, and in the character of a widow, took up her abode with Mrs. Martin, another widow, and got as much needle-work as she cared to do.

She was in no hurry to leave Halifax. For the present she would rest there, only taking care to leave the city before she could be traced there by her pursuers. But she had not been more than ten days in the city, nor more than three in her new boarding-house, when terrible news reached Halifax. The bark *Fairy* had foundered in a storm at sea, with two hundred souls on board!

The news had come from New York, whither the half-dozen survivors of the wreck picked up on a raft by the *Mercury* had been carried into port. Mollie saw herself and the child set down in the list of the lost, and thus it came to be firmly believed that the daughter of Musa Percie, with her nurse, was lost in the wreck of the *Fairy*.

A thrill of horror passed through the soul of the woman as she read the account of the disaster, and reflected how narrowly she and the child had escaped perishing with the

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two hundred victims who went down in the *Fairy* that awful night.

As soon as she recovered from the shock, however, she reflected how perfectly secure she should henceforth be from all chance of pursuit. She and the child were believed to have been lost at sea.

The child's mother would grieve for awhile, but would eventually become resigned. And the nurse would be left in peaceable possession forever.

And Mollie hugged the child to her bosom in a new ardor of love and joy, feeling that now nothing but death could separate them. She would teach little Musette to call her mother, and no one in the world should ever know but that she, Mollie, was really the child's mother. And she would change her name from Musette to Mary.

Mollie had still five hundred dollars left of her savings. This sum she wished to keep intact. So she went to work industriously with her needle to support herself and the child during their sojourn in Halifax.

She remained in Halifax until the first of May, working so well that she was enabled not only to pay her way there, but to save enough to buy her ticket for a second-class passage in an ocean steamer to Liverpool. On the first of May she embarked with the child on board the *Greenland,* travelling under her assumed name of Nelson. After a very pleasant voyage, she arrived with her little charge safe at Liverpool.

Leaving her trunks at the Custom House, she took little Musette by the hand and walked through the net-work of narrow streets that led her in a zig-zag way to the little ale-house in the crowded block that had been the home of her childhood.

No change seemed to have taken place in that locality

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during the two years of her absence. The same dingy houses flanked the sidewalk. The same quaint swinging sign hung in front of the old building—"The Prince's Feathers."

She walked in, leading the child by the hand. Neither her aunt nor her uncle was at the counter. A big, burly, red-faced and red-haired man of about forty years of age was tending the bar. Mary knew him well. He had been head waiter at a hotel near by, and a frequent visitor at her uncle's house. But he did not seem to recognize her.

"Mr. Corbin, don't you know me?" she inquired.

He raised his head and stared at her for a moment, and then exclaimed:

"Eh? What? Why, Mary, my lass, is this you?"

"Yes, Mr. Corbin. How is Uncle George and Aunt Jane?"

"They were well when I heard last."

"Where are my aunt and uncle, please, Mr. Corbin?"

The man stared again before he answered.

"To think of your expecting to find them here! Why, lass, they all emigrated to New Zealand, bag and baggage, children, puppies, kittens and canary birds, as much as eighteen months ago."

"To New Zealand!" exclaimed Mary, in amazement.

"Ay, to New Zealand! and a good job too, with as many children as they had."

"And who keeps this place now?" inquired Mary, uneasily.

"I do. I bought 'em out, house, stock, good will and all. And a good job for *me*. A man and his wife can get along where a house full of kids would starve," muttered this landlord, as he served out a pot of porter to a fresh customer.

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Then there came a lull in the noise, an interregnum in the receipt of custom. And for a few minutes the place was left to the landlord and woman and child.

"Come inside the bar and sit down, Mary. You 've set here often enough in old times, lass, eh? And tell me, now," he said, as soon as she had accepted his invitation and seated herself and taken the child on her lap, "tell me, Mary, where 's your man?"

"He is cruising on the coast of Africa, and won't be home for months. He advised me before he went away to come back here to my uncle and aunt, and stay with them till he came back. But I was so well situated in the States I had no call to come until lately."

"Is that his kid?" inquired the landlord.

"Yes," said Mary, "it is."

"And so you came over expecting to stay with the old 'uns, did you?" inquired the landlord.

"Yes," answered Mary, "but not to live on them. I thought to take my old place as barmaid, and pay for my keep and the child's that way. You know I used to be a great favorite, Mr. Corbin."

"*That* you were, lass, and drew a deal of custom. The business never prospered so well after you left. And that was partly why George Bean made up his mind to emigrate to New Zealand, and a good job, too, as I said before. Well, lass, and what do you think of doing now, seeing as your people are not here to take you in?" kindly inquired John Corbin.

"I 'm sure I don't know. I 'm so taken aback. I shall have to take time to turn myself around first," sadly answered the woman.

"Well, now, look here, Mary, you 're just the right woman, come to the right place in the right time, if you did

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but know it. Our barmaid, Ann Kittridge, left us three days ago to seek her fortune in the States. Hope she 'll find it, that 's all. Well, me and the missus have more than our hands full till we find another girl to suit us. And I don't see where we could find one to suit us better than you—no, nor so well. So, my lass, if so be you 're agreeable, you can step right in to your old quarters as nat'rel as if you had never left 'em."

"But the child?" suggested Mary.

"Oh, the kid will be no encumbrance! If there was more 'n one of them, why, to be sure—— But being only one, the missus won't mind. And here she comes now," said the landlord, as the landlady, a plump, rosy, good-humored dame of about forty years, entered the bar.

"Say, Martha, here 's Mollie Bean come back from 'Merica to stop with her people. Didn't know, you know, that they 'd gone away. I say, she 's just in the nick of time to take her old place behind the counter. What do you think of it?" inquired John Corbin, while his wife was shaking hands with Mary and welcoming her back.

"Why, I think if she 's willing, it 'll be just what we want. Is that your child, Mary?" inquired the landlady.

"There, go into the back parlor and talk to the missus, Mary, and arrange matters with her. And I 'll be agreeable. Here come a lot of customers," said Mr. Corbin, as he hustled the two women and the child good-humoredly out of the bar-room.

The result of the interview with the landlady was that Mary Morris was engaged as barmaid at the "Prince's Feathers."

Old acquaintanceships, interrupted for two years, were renewed, and old habitués of the house returned, and Mary proved as attractive in drawing custom now as she had been

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before her marriage. And she was quite naturally, under the circumstances, called Mollie Bean, as the name by which she had been best known to her neighbors.

Little Musette became the pet of the house. But Mollie told everybody who noticed the child that she was called Mary, after *herself;* and this was soon shortened into May, and the child soon learned to answer to it.

But she never forgot her own. And when any stranger inquired—

"What is your name, darling?" she always answered—

"Muta."

Every one loved her, because, if they would only permit her to do so, she loved every one. It was her nature to love. She had inherited the very best qualities of father and mother. She had inherited all her father's noble disinterestedness and all her mother's impassioned earnestness without that mother's self-willfulness. But as yet this nature was unconscious, intuitive in the infant's spirit.

With her native self-forgetfulness and tender sympathy and solicitous affection, with her soft caresses and earnest, wistful gaze, and sweet voice in murmuring her one beautiful phrase, "I lo'e you," she won all hearts.

No one, not the most hardened man or the most irritable woman in that rough neighborhood, could speak harshly to this sweet child, who offered love, and only love, to all.

Once only the little one was wounded. Another child, on the same street, a sickly, suffering, peevish little girl, struck Musette in the face.

She stood still in amazement for a moment, and then went up to her little aggressor, and putting her hand on her head with every expression of sympathy, kissed her and murmured:

"*Poor* Kitty! Kitty *so sick!*"

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It seemed as if she intuitively felt that nothing but sickness or suffering could have caused such an outbreak of temper.

Many such incidents as that marked the baby's first years of life, and caused the old women of the street to shake their heads and say:

"That child will never live *here*. Such children never *do*."

Yet Musette lived, and lived healthfully and happily.

And Mary Bean, as Mrs. Morris was now always called, grew to love and worship the child more and more.

So passed the first year after their arrival in England.

The child was nearly three years old. Nothing had occurred to disturb Mary Morris on account of Musette.

She had not heard a syllable of or from the bereaved mother or her friends. And as the time passed she grew perfectly confident of security in the possession of the child.

The time drew near when she might expect her husband home. He had enlisted as a common seaman in the United States naval service for three years. And his term of enlistment had nearly expired. She knew that he would return to the United States in his ship. But she thought that when the ship should be paid off, he would come over to Liverpool to seek her in her own home.

And then she would present little Musette to him as their own child. How proud he would be of the little girl!—of her beauty, her intelligence and her goodness!

It was while Mary Morris was indulging in these visions that an event occurred which disarranged all her calculations, and seriously affected the future destiny of little Musette.

One afternoon a man, with a small monkey and an organ,

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stopped before the house, and began to play while the monkey danced.

This collected a crowd. And a crowd is generally thirsty. So when the man stopped playing, and the monkey ceased to dance and began to carry around his little cap to collect the pennies, half the crowd slipped into the house, preferring to spend their pence in ale.

And Mollie had as much as she could do to serve all these customers. Consequently, she lost sight for a few moments of little Musette, who had gone out and mingled with the crowd, and being so small, had easily slipped through it and got quite up to the spot where the monkey was dancing.

She was so delighted with the fun that she began to laugh and clap her hands with glee.

And when the man stopped playing and the monkey stopped dancing and began to carry around his little cap to collect the pennies, she followed him through the crowd, trying to coax him to take a little cake from her hand.

"But "Jocko" was too well trained to neglect the main chance. And he diligently collected tribute money until the lessening crowd had filed into the ale-house or dispersed to their usual haunts, and no one was left but a few little street vagrants. The man strapped his organ to his back and led the monkey by a string and left the spot.

Musette followed, still offering her cake to the monkey, who, at last, snatched it. And then Musette continued to follow, watching him as he ate it.

And so the man, the monkey, half a dozen idle boys and girls and little Musette, wandered away from the neighborhood and down nearer the water-side, where there was much shipping and seemingly an endless forest of masts.

Here the man stopped before the entrance of an underground "saloon," or low drinking cellar, and as a crowd

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collected, he unstrapped his organ and began to play, while the monkey danced and little Musette laughed and clapped her hands with delight.

And even in that rough crowd of men and women, the beautiful, attractive child divided attention with the music and the monkey.

The organ-grinder quickly perceived this, and so, when he had finished his piece, and started the monkey around with its little red cap to collect the pennies, he took off his own old round hat, and gave it to little Musette, with a sign that she also should follow the monkey and collect the tribute.

And the child, delighted to be of use, toddled around after the monkey, holding up the old hat to every kind-looking face, and pence and half-pence rattled down into it until it was almost too heavy for the little hands to hold. Then the organ-grinder took it from her, and took out the contents by handfuls and transferred them to his pockets.

The man strapped his organ upon his back again and took his monkey by the string. Then he looked around. It was growing quite dark. The street lamps were being lighted, one after the other. And now there was no one near the organ-grinder except little Musette, who had sunk down upon the pavement, quite tired out, where she sat, grasping the leg of the man's trowsers, lest he should go and leave her alone.

He looked down at the child with even more attention than he had yet bestowed upon her. She was now over three years of age, and being a large child she looked still older. She was dressed in a pink calico frock and a white apron and white pantalettes.

"Now I wonder where I picked you up," said the man aloud. He could not remember where she had started to

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follow him, although he knew she had been with him for more than two hours. "I *do* wonder where I *did* pick you up?" he repeated.

But the child only gazed at him with her wistful dark eyes, while she sat and held fast to his trowsers.

"Here 's a go! I s'pose I have to take you home. Vill yer go home long o' me, say?" inquired the man, giving his free hand to the child (the other one was occupied with the monkey).

"'Es," she said, so eagerly that she must have misunderstood him, and supposed that he was offering to take her back to her own home.

He gave her his hand, and she sprang to her feet.

Then, carrying the organ strapped upon his back, and leading the child with his right hand, and the monkey, by a string, with his left, he toiled on toward his humble lodging; and "weary and heavy laden" as he was, he easily accommodated his gait to that of the little, tired child.

The old man's lodgings were humble, and his fare was plain, but he contrived to make Musette comfortable for the night. In the morning he started out on his peregrinations, intending, if possible, to find Musette's residence. But the child became so exhausted that old Barnaby (the organ-grinder) sat down, near the docks, and took her on his lap, where she immediately fell asleep.

Meanwhile, people passed and repassed. Occasionally one would stop an instant and take notice of the old organ-grinder with the sleeping child upon his breast. Presently a lad of about thirteen years of age passed by, throwing a glance at the group.

Then he stopped short, looked again, turned and walked up to the old organ-grinder, stared at the little sleeper, and then suddenly exclaimed:

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"Hallo! where did *you* get that child?"

At the sound of his voice, little Musette awoke, sat up, and gazed at the speaker with her deep, dark, earnest eyes.

The boy impulsively held out his arms, exclaiming:

"Hallo, little Musette! Don't you know Sam? Your own Sam? Won't you come to Sam? *Poor* Sam!"

"No; she don't know you, and she won't go to you," exclaimed the old organ-grinder, hugging the child close to his bosom.

"Where did you get her?" demanded the boy.

"And who be you, pray, as asks the question so mighty peert?" demanded the old man in his turn.

"I am Sam Seaforth, a sailor on board the *Honolulu*, just returned from a two years' voyage round Cape Horn. And I ask you again, how you came by that child?"

"Vell now, how do you know as she is not my own kid?"

Sam Seaforth, for the boy was really our fugitive lad, paused and thought hard and fast for a few moments and then he answered:

"I know she 's not yours, because I know she is mine—my own little foster-sister."

"And vot *I* vant to know is, vot right you have to say as this is yer little sister as yer haven't seen since she vas a babby?" persisted the organ-grinder.

"I told you she was the same. I know her by—by—by *herself*. Her name is Musette. And she has got the mark of a small red heart on the palm of her right hand."

"Oh! you might o' seen *that* since yer been standing here," objected the old man.

"How could I? That hand has been around you, hidden under your arm all the time I have been here, and you

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know it. Come! I am going to test this matter; for I 'm blest if I don't find out all about how you got hold of the child. Baby," he said, softly addressing the child, "what is your name?"

"Muta," answered the little one, who had not ceased to gaze on his face.

"There, I told you so! 'Muta,' that 's the nearest she can come to Musette. Now hold out your little hand. Let Sam see your little hand."

She held out her free left hand.

"No, not that one—the other hand."

She drew her right hand from under the arm of the old man, and held it out.

"There! I told you so! There! look at that! a little red heart marked in her right hand—a mother-mark, her nurse used to call it. Do you see it now?" triumphantly inquired the boy, holding the little palm open under the eyes of the man.

"Yes, I see it now," said old Barnaby, "but I never see it afore."

"That 's because you haven't had the child in your hands long. And now, once for all, you have got to tell me how you came by the child, or else I call a policeman," said Sam.

"My lad, yer 've got no call to be so wiolent. This young un followed of me and my monkey along of a lot o' kids yesterday. I don't know vere she jined me, and it wasn't until I had stopped for good and all, and this kid was left alone a clinging to my clothes, as I found out as she was lost."

"What are you going to do with her?"

"Vell, I started out this morning to look for her parients; but if so be as yer 'er brother, as yer say, vy

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yer 'll know vere to take 'er, I reckon," said the old man, still suspiciously.

Sam paused for a little while. He really did not know what to say without betraying family secrets. But seeing the old man scrutinizing him with more and more suspicion, he answered sharply:

"Her *foster*-brother, I said. My own mother had charge of her from the first and up to the time I went to sea."

"Vere do yer mother live?" doubtfully inquired the organ-grinder.

"She didn't live in this neighborhood when I went to sea, though she may have moved since," discreetly replied Sam.

"Hodd yer don't know vere yer own mother lives," doubtfully commented old Barnaby, shaking his head.

"I tell you I have only just landed this very morning. And my mother may have moved. I know she didn't live anywhere near here when I went away. And now look here, my venerable old prophet, now I have set eyes on that child, I don't intend to lose sight of her. So take up your line of march straight for the house where you took her from. I will go along with you and keep you in sight. And mind, if I see the least sign of foul play, I'll call a policeman and ask him to take us three before a magistrate, who will soon find out what is what," said Sam Seaforth, with all the spirit of his grandfather, the "Old Harry," inspiring him.

"Good lack, lad! yer needn't be so wicious. 'Tan't likely as I can run away from yer, loaded down as I 'd be with the horgan, let alone leading the monkey and the child. And if so be as yer agreeable, you may just shoulder the child yerself and tote 'er, for I reckon as how she 's valked enough for one day," said old Barnaby, as he stood

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Musette upon the pavement, while he took up his organ and strapped it upon his back.

"Come, Musette. Come to Sam. Come to '*Own* Sam' —*Poor* Sam!" pleaded the boy, holding out his arms.

The child suddenly ran into them. And when he lifted her to his bosom, she threw her arms around his neck and laid her head on his shoulder, murmuring:

"I love oo!"

"I wonder if she remembers me, ever so little," asked Sam of the circumambient air.

It could not tell him. And neither could I. The subject of memory in a little child is a very occult one.

"Go see mammy now?" said little Musette.

"Yes, darling. Go see mammy now," answered the boy.

Sam, with the child in his arms, moved on, following the organ-grinder with the monkey. They went on some distance without stopping. Then the organ-grinder stopped before an old tenement house with an underground drinking cellar, and said:

"Here vas vere the crowd left her, and I began to look after her. She 'd been a following of me long afore that, I know. And now I come to think on 't, I fust noticed of her down by the 'Prince's Feathers.' Yer know the 'Prince's Feathers?'"

"No, I don't," said Sam.

"Vell, it 's a hale 'ouse down nigh the fut of Ship Street. There 's vere I first took notice on 'er, though in course she might ha' been a following of me long afore that, too. Bless yer, such a lot o' kids was at my heels, how could I tell?"

"Where is the 'Prince's Feathers?'" inquired Sam.

"Over yonder way. Fut o' Ship Street. Come, ve 'll go there. It 's a good piece."

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The party soon arrived at the Prince's Feathers.

Mollie had hunted wildly for the child until she swooned with terror and exhaustion. She was then taken home and put to bed, and had just risen to resume her search, when the landlady came running up the stairs, calling out:

"Mollie! Mollie! the child is found. A horgan-grinder and a sailor-boy have brought 'er home."

With a cry of joy Mollie fled past the landlady down to the bar, outside of which stood the organ-grinder, the monkey, the sailor-boy and the child.

"Mammy!" cried little Musette, running toward her with outstretched arms.

"Oh, my darling! my darling! my angel! have I got you again! Oh, thank Heaven! Thank Heaven!" cried Mollie, distracted with joy, as she caught the child to her bosom and covered her with caresses and flooded her with tears.

"I love oo—I love oo," said little Musette, patting Mollie's cheeks soothingly, for she seemed in doubt whether her foster-mother were really rejoicing or grieving.

"Oh, my love! my pet! my sweet, sweet child! I will never let you out of my sight again!" cried Mollie, renewing her caresses. She saw nothing but the child. The organ-grinder and the sailor-boy stood unnoticed.

"I think, Mollie, lass, yer 'd do well to say a vord of thanks to them as found the kid, and came out of their vay to fetch her 'ome to you," suggested the landlord.

"Oh, yes! Thank you! thank you very much! I shall never forget your kindness! Here, here, *take this!* give them this!" she said, as, without looking at the old man or boy, she handed a couple of half-crowns to the landlord, who immediately offered one to the sailor-boy.

"Give 'em both to the old man," said Sam, shortly.

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And the landlord put both pieces in old Barnaby's hand, who at once left the house.

Meantime, Mollie, sitting in the big arm-chair, continued to rock the child backward and forward, weeping and rejoicing over her, while customers were coming into the bar. Sam Seaforth stood there staring at the woman, but still unnoticed.

"Mollie, lass," whispered the landlord, "don't yer see as yer a making a show of yerself? Hadn't yer better take the babby in the missus's room till yer 've done crying over her?"

"Oh, yes! I wasn't minding!" said Mollie, rising to leave the bar-room.

"And what are *you* waiting for, my lad?" inquired the landlord, not unkindly, of Sam.

"I—I want to speak to that young woman," said the boy, who had been standing still, staring with amazement at Mollie.

"Well! there she goes! follow her," said Mr. Corbin.

Sam stepped after Mollie into the landlady's back parlor, which was at this moment unoccupied.

Mollie sat down on a low chair and took the child on her lap.

Sam Seaforth went and stood before her, and said:

"Mrs. Morris, don't you know me?"

Mollie started violently at the sound of the familiar voice, looked up, and turned deathly pale, as she faintly exclaimed:

"Sam Seaforth! Great Heaven!"

"Why, what 's the matter, Mollie? What are you frightened of? One would think you 'd seen my ghost instead of me," said the boy.

"I—I didn't expect to see you here," faltered Mollie.

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"I reckon you expected to see me about as much as I expected to see you, or little Musette either. Lord! I was so knocked over when I saw the child with the old organ-grinder, that I did not know whether I was asleep or awake. Now I want to know where are they all?"

"Where are who?" faltered Mollie, still staring at him.

"All of them—mother and step-father, and Musette's mother."

"Oh, they are—they are—they are——" stammered Mollie. And then, without finishing her sentence, she suddenly inquired:

"Where did *you* come from? How came *you* here, Sam?"

"Oh, you know I went to sea, didn't you? Well, I came over here to Liverpool, and then I shipped for the Pacific. I was gone two years. Ship just got in port and paid off her hands this morning. That's the way I'm here. But how came *you* here? And where are all the others? Are they all here?"

By this time Mollie had made up a story to tell; so she shook her head solemnly, and said:

"Oh, Sam, Sam, it is awful!"

"*What* is awful? Is anybody dead? Was it a fire, or a shipwreck, or a collision, or what?" demanded the boy, in alarm.

"No, nothing of all that. And nobody's dead. But it was awful, the way they all treated this poor, dear, innocent lamb, who would have been sent to the Foundling if it hadn't been for poor me, Sam," said Mollie.

"*Who* treated her? What are you talking about, Mrs. Morris? Why, they all seemed to dote on little Musette!" exclaimed the boy, reddening.

"Oh, yes, '*seemed*,' and that was all. First her mother

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went and got married to a proud, jealous gentleman, of the name of Carew. And she was afraid or ashamed to acknowledge her own child. And so she abandoned little Musette."

"But *my* mother, *my* poor, dear mother. *She* didn't desert little Musette?"

"Oh, no, she—she would have kept the child and me, too, to wait on it; but you see, when no more money was sent for Musette, Mr. Wilks turned ugly, and said *he* wasn't a going to support other people's brats, and a woman to wait on 'em besides."

"I'd like to wring his neck for him! I'll do it some of these days yet! Mind if I don't! Go on, Mollie."

"Well, he led poor Mrs. Wilks *such* a life, what with growling about the expense of keeping the child, and keeping the nurse, and so on, the upshot of it was I had to leave and take the child with me. I had no home in New York, and so I brought her over here to my old home. And here we are. Now, Sam, look here. I have adopted this child for my *own*. And I want you to keep my secret, and never let on to any of the people here but what she *is* my child. I don't want anybody to think she is a poor little forsaken child, as her mother is ashamed to own. Will you keep my secret, Sam? I don't want anybody to think as little Musette is a poor——"

"Yes, of course I'll keep the secret, Mollie. I'd do anything for Musette, even to going back home for her. Yes, Mollie, I'll go right back in the next steamer. I have got money, and I'll take a steerage passage, and I'll go right back home and try to find out Musette's mother, for I *know* she has not deserted the child. She had no reason to be ashamed of her. I *know* she hadn't!" exclaimed the boy, reddening up like his grandfather, the Old

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Harry, in the eagerness of his defense. "I could lay my life she hadn't! And I'll go right over to the United States and——"

"Sam! Sam! you 'll do nothing of the kind! Listen to me. As soon as you left home, your step-father advertised you, *by name*, in all the papers, and offered fifty dollars reward for your apprehension, just as if you had been a runaway negro. And he said, when you were caught, you should be put in the House of Refuge for a year to teach you better. Just think of it," said Mollie, solemnly.

"Advertised me like a thief, did he? Would put me in the House of Refuge, among the juvenile pickpockets, would he? *Oh-h-h!* won't I settle with him when I meet him, that 's all!" exclaimed the boy, panting with excitement.

"Yes, Sam, but you 'll have to wait until you are twenty-one to do that. You are under age, Sam, and your mother and your step-father can do all he has threatened to do, if they catch you. If you wish to be free, you will have to stay over this side of the pond, and keep shady, too. Stay here and help to take care of little Musette, Sam. I dare say as our landlord can find something for you to do about the house," said Mollie, who was frightened at the very thought of the boy's return to New York with her secret in his possession.

"Will you stay here with me, Sam?" she inquired, seeing that he did not answer.

"I don't know. All this has come so suddenly on a fellow. But, Mollie, I know one thing. You oughtn't to keep that child at a public-house. You told me you had saved money. How much money have you got?"

"A matter of a hundred pounds," answered the woman.

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"And I have got nearly fifty pounds, and you are welcome to it, if you will do what I propose."

"And what will that be?"

"Well, you see, I feel uneasy here; first, on little Musette's account; next, on my own. This is a dreadful place to bring up a little lady in. She will be hearing all sorts of bad language and seeing all sorts of improper things. And it is dangerous for me; for you may depend old Wilks got a clue to me and found out about me shipping aboard the *Honduras* for the Pacific Ocean. And he 'll remember when she be due on her return and he 'll keep a watch out, and when he hears the ship is in port he 'll come or send for me. If it was only a question between him and me, I wouldn't mind. I 'd settle *him*. But he has got the law on his side. I will not resist the *law*, though I will not submit to *him*. So *I* mean to go and lose myself in London until I can get a good berth in an East Indiaman, or something. And before I go to sea again I will write a letter to poor, dear mother to set her mind at ease, and give it to *you* to post after I am off."

"Do, Sam. And *I 'll* post it," said Mollie, who had no intention of doing anything of the sort, but rather of suppressing the letter altogether. "And now, Sam," she continued, "you told me——"

"That I would give you all my savings to help to provide for the little lady, if you would do what I propose. Well, it is this—that you take your money and mine and go up to London, and take a house and furnish it, and let lodgings to respectable tenants; that is a quiet, decent way for a poor woman to invest her little money and get an honest living."

"I—like the plan, Sam. If I wasn't afraid of losing all

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my money, I 'd do it. However, as you said yourself, I 'll think of it."

This ended the subject for the time being.

And Mollie "thought of it" to such practical purpose, that she gave warning to her employers, and within a month's time she was settled in London. She had a medium-sized, plainly-furnished house in Wellington street, Strand, with a neatly-written placard of "Apartments to Let" on the door.

Sam Seaforth got a berth in an East Indiaman, bound for Calcutta, and shipped himself for the voyage, almost immediately after Mollie took possession of her new home.

The boy wrote a long, loving letter to his mother, telling her how well he was in body and mind; how fortunate he had been in meeting Mollie Morris and little Musette in Liverpool; how well and thriving they were; how much he loved his mother, and longed to be with her; and how he should certainly come to live with her as soon as he should be of age and independent of Mr. Wilks. And he begged her not to fret either about him or little Musette, although but for Mr. Wilks they never would have been separated from her. He intrusted this letter to Mollie, and begged her to mail it the day after his ship should have sailed.

Mollie read his letter to his mother. And then, not without feelings of remorse, she put it into the fire.

"Oh, how I sin and how I suffer for the sake of keeping you, little Musette!" she sighed, as she lifted the child to her lap.

"I love you," said Musette, putting her hands each side her nurse's face, and putting up her plump lips to kiss away the tears.

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Mollie Morris did not prosper in her lodging house. She had no business talent whatever.

It was three months before she got a lodger, who stayed with her two months, and went away without having paid her a penny.

Another month passed away without a lodger. She began to get into debt, wherever she could get credit, and she ran bills as long as that credit lasted.

Then one by one her best articles of furniture went to auction, and was sold at a sacrifice to procure the daily necessaries of life.

At last, late in November, when little Musette was about five years old, the landlord, seeing the furniture go bit by bit, got alarmed for the two quarters' rent due him, and levied on all her personal effects that the law would allow him to take for debt. The butcher, the baker, and the grocer followed suit. And so it happened that on little Musette's birthday Mollie Morris found herself and the child homeless and penniless in the street.

"Don't cry, mammy, my dear mammy! *I* love you. I *do* love you," said little Musette, with the most tender compassion in every tone, as if she thought indeed that "love was the greatest good in the world," and a balm for every wound.

Mollie had one precious little piece of property that had escaped the hands of the bailiffs, and now stood a temporary bar between her and starvation—it was the little gold watch and chain that had been given her by Musa.

Through all her troubles Mollie had kept this. Lately she had kept it concealed for fear of the bailiffs.

Now she knew the time had come when she must sell or pawn it to procure food and lodging for herself and child that night.

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She bent her steps first to a pawnbroker's shop, where, after some suspicious delay on the part of the money-lender, she succeeded in getting an advance of two pounds on a watch and chain worth twenty.

With this money in her pocket, she went to a narrow, crowded street, where she knew cheap lodgings were to be let. And by paying a week's rent in advance, she procured a small, poorly-furnished room, on the second floor, directly over a rag and bottle shop.

Here the struggle for life grew harder than it ever had been before. Mollie tried to get work, but every avenue of labor seemed crowded to suffocation in that great city, so that, seek as diligently as she might, Mollie could get but very little.

During the long winter that followed, piece after piece of her clothing that had been saved from the household wreck, was pawned or sold to procure food or fuel.

In March Mollie fell ill. Hunger, cold, disappointment and despair had done their work upon her and laid her low.

And then it was beautiful and piteous to see how the little child of about five and a half years old, tried to be helpful; how she went to the street and gathered waste-paper, rags, sticks, chips, and brought them to the cold grate and tried to make a fire; how she took the little stumpy straw broom and tried to sweep the hearth; and how she brought tin cups of cold water from the pump—pumped for her by a street-boy—and how she wet cotton rags and tried to wash the sick woman's face and hands, murmuring all the while:

"Don't cry, mammy. *I* love you. Oh, I *do* love you so much!"

But Mollie got worse. Little Musette grew graver. Her

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brain was very busy with devices to help her "dear mammy."

She noticed that some little boys and girls swept crossings, and picked up pennies that way. And she knew that pennies would buy bread and tea and sugar for "poor mammy."

So one April day, taking counsel only of her own loving heart, little Musette, while her mammy was sleeping, took the stumpy straw broom with which she had so often tried to sweep her own hearth, and trailing it after her she went down-stairs and out of the house to—of all things in the world—to sweep a crossing to earn pennies for her sick mammy.

But the little gamins of the street soon instructed her that she must not poach upon any other sweeper's premises. She must find a crossing for herself.

So she wandered down several streets, around many corners, until she reached Oxford Street, where she found an apparently unclaimed crossing.

Here she began to use her little stumpy broom with much zeal, sweeping diligently as she crossed and recrossed the street, and at every stopping she held out her tiny hand to foot-passengers, as she had seen other small crossing-sweepers do.

(Ah! if by any power of clairvoyance, her own mother could have seen her then! Her own mother, who at the very moment was playing with Musette's beautiful, bright, blue-eyed, three-year-old sister, in the earthly paradise of Bay Beauty!)

Many of the street passengers hurried by without even seeing the sad little sweeper. But every one who stopped and met the pathetic gaze of her grave, tender, dark eyes, dropped a penny in the little open palm.

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Crowds of vehicles of every description were constantly whirling up and down, until it seemed a miracle, from moment to moment, that this tiny toiler in the turmoil of the street was not run over and instantly killed.

At last, toward the close of the day, when the declining sun, seen through a slight London fog, made the far end of the street look like a gilded sea with the mist upon it, little Musette grew tired, giddy and confused. Her limbs failed, her head swam; the setting sun dazzled her eyes. She wanted to go home and go to sleep on her mammy's bed.

Poor little one! she never doubted but that she could find her way home quite easily; in truth, she never thought of a difficulty.

But she wished to gather "a heap" of pennies for her poor mammy, and so, with dizzy brain, and dazzled eyes, and tottering limbs, and trembling hands, she tried to sweep through the horrible confusion of carriages and horses coming and going in every direction, until——

Ah, Heaven!

In starting to get out of the way of a heavy van, she fell under the wheels of a cabriolet.

There was a cry of horror; a sudden pulling up of horses; a street commotion.

"Is the child hurt?" cried the occupant of the carriage, springing to the ground.

"She is killed, your Grace," gravely replied the groom, who had raised from the ground and now held in his arms the unconscious form of little Musette.

Was the beautiful little body dead? Had the loving little spirit passed out? If so, it was well for her.

Little Musette was already an angel ripe for inmost Heaven.

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CHAPTER XXXI.

AFTER SOME YEARS.

WE must now return to the Chesapeake and to the Carews.

Some events had happened in that circle, which, while they were very significant to their subjects, were of so little importance to our story that they may be passed over very briefly.

First, then, the two old veterans, Commodore Howard and Colonel Carew, were gathered to their fathers.

Old Harry had previously made a will in favor of his grandson, Samuel Carew, commonly called Sam Seaforth, and appointed Mr. Lyttleton Locke and Mr. August Carew executors. He had also provided handsomely for Kate, who, in addition to her legal "thirds," had a life interest in the old homestead at Pirate's Peak.

It was in the autumn succeeding the departure of the two old men, that August Carew turned his attention to politics.

He served two years in the legislature of his native State, and was then elected a representative of his district in Congress.

And Musa, with her fair little daughter Ethelinde, accompanied her husband to Washington at the meeting of Congress, and, for the first time in five years, occupied her renovated city palace on Vermont Avenue and resumed her rôle as a leader of fashion.

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Musa, as the wife of a rising statesman, was even more courted, fêted and idolized than she had ever been before as a maiden, a beauty, and an heiress. The slight cloud that had lowered over her girlhood had passed away, leaving her prospects more brilliant than before.

Young, beautiful, wealthy; the beloved wife of a handsome, accomplished, and distinguished man; the adored mother of the fairest child on the face of the earth, she was the envy as well as the admiration of all who knew her.

But was Musa happy? Ah, no!

The memory of her lost child was ever present with her. The image of her meek-eyed darling was ever before her. She believed little Musette to be safe in heaven, but she could scarcely realize it as a truth.

There were times when her longing to clasp the lost little one to her famishing heart became so intolerable in its passion and intensity that she panted to get away from the Earth and seek little Musette in the vast unknown beyond; times when she lay upon her bed at night with closed eyes, and folded hands, and yearning soul, invoking the spirit of the child to come, if it were possible to do so, and comfort her; and when she prayed to the Lord, if it were His will, so to send her darling to her.

There were seasons in which she grew impatient of her own youth, and of the long years of earthly life that seemed to stretch far away into the future, before she could grow old and pass away to that "mansion not made with hands, eternal in the heavens," where she should find again and clasp to her yearning heart the form of her meek-eyed child.

And yet she loved her friends and companions of the earth, and she adored her husband and their little girl,

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Ethelinde. Nor was she indifferent to the brilliant position she occupied in society, nor to the splendid political prospects of her husband as a popular and distinguished statesman.

Only—she was like the shepherd in the Bible story, who losing one lamb, left the flock in the wilderness, and went sorrowing after that which was lost. So at times her spirit left all her possessions behind, and went grieving, yearning and searching after the lamb that was lost.

She never spoke of the bitterness of her incurable grief to any one. She did not wish to overshadow any other life with the reflection of her own sorrow. Yet, still it was often perceptible to those who loved her.

Sometimes a wild hope passed through the bereaved mother's heart. Was it not possible that little Musette might have been saved from the shipwreck? Musa had heard and read of some almost miraculous rescues of shipwrecked passengers.

Who could positively say that little Musette might not have been picked up by some ship bound to a distant port, and that she might not be some day heard of?

But this hope was so wild, so improbable, and indeed so terrifying, that Musa would not entertain it.

It was so much more distressing to think of the gentle child adrift in this rough world than to think of her safe in heaven.

Nevertheless, the thought of her possible rescue and continued existence *would* come again and again, though it was never welcomed.

Musa had another topic of interest and speculation, Samuel Harold Carew, the fugitive heir of Pirate's Peak.

Mr. Lyttleton Locke and Mr. August Carew, as joint executors of Colonel Carew's will, had never ceased in their

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efforts to discover the young adventurer. They had kept a good lookout for the return of the *Honduras* from the Pacific, and had sent a man over in search of the young sailor.

But the messenger only arrived in time to trace Sam to London, and to learn there that he had shipped again, and *this* time on board of the East Indiaman *Bengal,* bound for the Cape of Good Hope and Calcutta.

That was the last news that had been received of Sam for the last three years.

They were all now watching the shipping news in the English papers for intelligence of the return of the *Bengal,* intending to send another messenger to meet and intercept the absconding young Fortunatus.

It was near the close of this season in Washington that Musa received a piece of news that filled her sad heart with joy. It was the announcement of the approaching marriage of the young Duke of Montcalla to his Welsh cousin, the Lady Gwendolyn Tremontane.

She remembered the name of her old rival, whom the parents of the young Earl of Cressy wished him to marry upon mere family and financial grounds, and whose face the proposed bridegroom declared that he had never once beheld. And she wondered now what that face, which had made Bertie forget her own, was like.

With smiles and tears she carried the English papers in which she had read the news to her husband's study and showed it to him, saying:

"I am so glad! For I *know* it is a love match. Bertie would *never* desecrate marriage by entering it from any other motive."

August laughed, and kissed and congratulated her, on behalf of her young friend.

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Mr. Carew's political advancement was very rapid for so young a man. A new minister was to be dispatched to the Court of St. James, and when the good judgment of the Administration selected General ——— to fill that responsible post, Mr. Carew was appointed as his Secretary of Legation.

August resigned his seat in the House of Representatives and prepared for his voyage to Europe; and, in the last week of April, Mr. and Mrs. Carew, with only two servants —Pendragon and Cassy—took leave of their friends, and went on to New York, preparatory to their voyage to Europe.

While in the city, August and Musa took time to run up to Inwood, and see Mr. and Mrs. Wilks.

They found the worthy couple well and moderately prosperous. Mr. Wilks was earning a modest but sufficient income by teaching a school. Maggie was radiant with delight at a letter that she had just received from her long-absent son, who had got back to Liverpool from his voyage to the Antipodes.

"To think, dear ma'am, as this is the first letter I have received from him since the one he wrote me when he first went away, which was five years ago last January. And this letter is as short as anything. He just says he has landed at Liverpool, and is well, and how he is going to London to see '*them*,' and then he 'll tell me how '*they*' are. Now, who he means, ma'am, I can't tell for the life of me. He writes just like a careless boy," said Maggie, with a puzzled air.

"Have you answered his letter, Maggie?" inquired Mrs. Carew.

"Oh, yes, dear ma'am, and I have told him about his poor dear grandfather's death." (Maggie had changed her

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tone in speaking of the Old Harry now.) "And I have explained all about the fortune left him, and begged of him to come home. But I doubt he'll come, ma'am. And that makes me so glad you and Mr. Carew are going to London. Perhaps you will see him."

"We shall make it a point to do so," said Mr. Carew. "You are aware that I am his guardian by his grandfather's will."

"Oh, yes, I know you are, sir, and very kind of you, too. And, moreover, the boy sets so much store by Mrs. Carew that, if she speaks to him, he will do whatever she tells him to, even to coming back home," replied Maggie.

The next day the embassy sailed from New York in the government steamship *Messenger*, which, after a very pleasant voyage of nine days, anchored safely in the Mersey.

The embassy spent but one day in Liverpool, and then proceeded to London, where they arrived on the evening of the twelfth of May, in the very height of the London fashionable season.

One of the first acts of Mr. and Mrs. Carew was to go down to the East India Docks and inquire for the *Bengal*. They were informed that the ship was at Gravesend. And to Gravesend they immediately went. The *Bengal* lay at anchor a short distance from the shore, and Mr. Carew hired a row-boat to take himself and wife out to her.

They were received on board by the third mate. Of this man Mr. Carew inquired for Samuel Seaforth, adding at the same time that he himself was the boy's guardian. "Is the lad on board?" inquired Mr. Carew.

"Yes, sir, he is on board. Coxswain! send young Seaforth forward!" said the mate, raising his voice.

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"Ay, ay, sir!" answered the coxswain, going aft.

"The lad's time is out, sir. And it is by mere chance he is here to-day. After his kit, or something," the mate explained, as Sam Seaforth was seen approaching.

He was now a very handsome lad, about sixteen years old, and tall for his age, with a fine, frank face, lighted up by a pair of bright black eyes, and shaded by silky, curling black hair. As he came up he looked enough like Musa to be her younger brother. He was clothed in the dress of a common seaman, and only distinguishable from others by the dainty cleanliness of his person and attire.

"Mrs. White!" exclaimed the lad, in a tone of delight, as he instantly recognized Musa, and forgot for the moment that he had heard of her second marriage. "Oh, I am so glad to see you!"

"Mrs. Carew, my dear boy," said Musa, gently, as she gave him her hand, which he shook heartily.

"Oh, pray excuse me, ma'am. I did hear, but I forgot," said the boy, blushing with confusion.

"This is my husband, Mr. August Carew," continued Musa.

The boy bowed very respectfully. But August held out his hand, saying:

"We must be friends, Master Carew. We are related. I suppose you know that your name is Carew?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I know it; but I had got to be called after my first step-father's name somehow, and that name always stuck to me. I had no wish to change it. Mr. Seaforth was the only father I ever knew, and neither my poor mother nor myself ever owed much to the Carews," frankly replied Sam.

"I know it, my boy. But that is all changed now. I have a great deal to tell you. But I cannot enter upon

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the subject here. I am told that your time is out on board this ship?"

"Yes, sir. I only came here this morning to see an old comrade."

"And you are now at liberty to go?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I wish you to accompany me to London at once."

"I want to ask you a question first, sir. You see, sir, this meeting has come upon me like a thunder-clap. I thought, when I was sent for, that the mate wanted me himself. Then when I saw Mrs. Carew, I was so delighted that I forgot my danger——"

"'Danger,' my young friend?" echoed Mr. Carew.

"Yes, sir—danger of being arrested and taken back to the hateful despotism of my second step-father. And the question I wished to ask is this, sir—whether it is your intention to take me back? Because, sir—I do not wish to be rude—but I won't go back. I'll die first!" said Sam, crimsoning.

"It is certainly not my intention to take you back, or rather to send you back against your will, my boy. You shall hear all that I have to say, and then decide for yourself. Will you come up to London with me now?"

"Yes, sir. I was going up to London any way," answered Sam. And then he looked at Musa and suddenly became very grave.

In the first surprise and excitement of meeting her, and in the subsequent distrust and anxiety in regard to Mr. Carew's intentions toward himself, the boy had forgotten the fate of little Musette. Now he remembered it, and could scarcely keep the tears from his eyes.

"What is the matter, Sam?" inquired the lady.

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"Oh, nothing, ma'am. I am ready to go with you now," answered the boy.

"I saw your mother the day before we sailed from New York. She was quite well. She had got your letter and had answered it," said Musa.

"Had she, ma'am? I haven't got the answer yet. I s'pose I shall soon, though. I am glad mother is well," he said, still looking at Musa gravely and sadly.

As the boat was now waiting alongside for them, Mr. Carew bade the civil mate good-morning and with his party left the ship.

They went back to London immediately. Mr. and Mrs. Carew took Sam with them to their hotel. But it was not until they had had luncheon and the table was cleared away and the room closed and the lady and gentleman and boy were left alone together, that Mr. Carew entered upon the business of the hour.

"In the first place, Samuel Carew, you have made such a great mistake in the character and disposition of your step-father, and done him such cruel injustice, that I cannot but think your mind has been poisoned against him by some other person. Now to other matters: Your grandfather, Colonel Harold Carew, died about three years ago. Did you know that?"

"No, sir. I did not even know that he was living when I left home. I barely knew that I *had* a grandfather who had turned my father out of doors; but whether he was living or dead, I did not know, and did not care. I sympathized with my father," said Sam.

"There were faults on both sides, my boy, and plenty of them. Well, you will do justice to your grandfather's character when you hear a little more about him in his own neighborhood, where he was very much loved and honored

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for his generosity, notwithstanding his fiery temper and despotic will. Your grandfather, Master Carew, has left you his whole estate, with the exception of a just provision for his widow."

"Oh, then I have got an old grandmother!" exclaimed the boy.

"A rather young step-grandmother," said Mr. Carew, smiling to think of "bonny Kate" in such a relationship.

"A step-grandmother! Oh, bother!" exclaimed the lad, in deep disgust and abhorrence. "I beg your pardon, sir, but it is perfectly abominable all these 'steps!'—a step-father, a step-grandmother—oh, lor!"

"I do not think, Master Carew, that you need be troubled by these step-relations of yours. I, in conjunction with a worthy Washington lawyer, have been appointed your guardian. I do not think you will find me a very disagreeable one."

"I am sure not, sir. I am very grateful to you for undertaking such a troublesome trust. And I am very glad you are not old Wilks. Old Wilks has nothing to do with me now, sir, has he?"

"The Rev. Mr. Wilks has nothing to do with you. But you will do that gentleman justice some of these days, and speak of him with more respect," said Mr. Carew, very gravely.

"Oh, sir, but you would not say so if you knew how cruelly he has used poor, dear, good, little——" Sam suddenly stopped, bit his lip, and flushed up to his forehead.

Mr. Carew looked at the boy keenly, but forbore to ask any questions.

"As you have left the service, Master Carew, I think it

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expedient that you should drop the uniform. I will take the liberty," he said, smiling slightly, "of recommending you to my tailors, the Messrs. Smith, Number — Regent street. I wish you to take up your residence with Mrs. Carew and myself until we can decide upon your future course. I have now an engagement and will leave you with Mrs. Carew. This belongs to you," he added, handing what seemed to be a rather bulky letter to the youth, who looked at it inquiringly, bowed and slipped it in his pocket to be examined at some future opportunity.

When Mr. Carew had left the room, Musa turned to her young friend and again inquired:

"My boy, what is the matter with you? You could have trusted Mr. Carew implicitly. He is very wise and good. You *could* have trusted *him;* but you *will* trust me. Tell me your trouble now, Sam."

"Oh, Mrs, Carew! First answer me one question, will you?" inquired the boy, in an earnest tone.

"It depends upon the question, Sam. What is it, my lad?" kindly asked Musa.

"Oh, Mrs. Carew, when you married Mr. Carew, you did not forsake little Musette, did you?" inquired the boy, in a tone of passionate earnestness.

Musa gazed at him in silent astonishment for a moment, and then broke forth:

"*I* desert my darling child? my sad-eyed little angel? Oh, Sam, what could have put such a thought into your head? She was stolen from me! Cruelly and treacherously stolen from me! It was the same winter, and indeed it was the same month, in which you went to sea—five years ago—that the nurse, Mollie Morris, stole the child and embarked with her in the ship *Fairy* for Liverpool. It was wrecked in mid-ocean and my darling, my little meek,

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gentle child, was swallowed up in the wintry sea!" she cried, with a sob.

"For the Lord's sake, hold on," said Sam, staring more wildly than ever—"you say, ma'am, it was *five* years ago since that happened?"

"Five years ago last January, my boy."

"And you think she really *was* lost and no mistake?"

"Ah, my boy, there have been moments when I have thought there might be some hope; but there can be none, Sam."

"Lord, whatever shall I do?" muttered Sam to himself. "Mrs. Carew," he then inquired, "have you got such a thing as a salts bottle about you?"

"No, my boy—why?"

"Because if you had a salts bottle, I wanted you to smell it hard. I have got something to tell you, Mrs. Carew, and I don't want you to faint away," said Sam, simply.

The lady's face suddenly went white as death. But she commanded herself, and said peremptorily:

"Tell me at once what you have to tell, Sam. Suspense is worse than the worst news can be to me now."

"It is not the worst news," murmured the boy, still hesitating.

"Does it concern my lost child? SAY!" exclaimed the lady.

"Yes, it does; but it is not bad news."

"Tell me! tell me!"

"Well, then, little Musette was not lost in the *Fairy*. I met her myself in Liverpool two years and a half after that."

"Oh, Heaven! Sam! Sam!" cried the lady, seizing

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his arm and gazing wildly in his face, "where? when? how? Tell me all at once! Musette alive! ALIVE!" and the lady sank back in her chair, overwhelmed with emotion.

"Steady, steady, dear Mrs. Carew. It 's all right. I 'll tell you all about it. Oh, good gracious! I might have known I should knock her over with the news. Is there any hartshorn, or wine, or anything about, I wonder?" exclaimed the boy, in the utmost alarm, as he went cruising around the room in search of some restorative.

"I want nothing, Sam, but news of my child. Musette alive! Oh, Heaven of Heavens!" exclaimed Musa, still the prey of wildly conflicting emotions.

"Well, drink this glass of water anyway, please, ma'am, and brace up, and I 'll tell you all I know. It is *all* right," urged the boy, tendering the goblet.

Musa drank the water and returned the glass, with an emphatic: "Now!"

Sam drew a chair to her side and commenced and related how, on the very day of his landing at Liverpool from his first South American voyage, he saw little Musette in the street, asleep in the arms of an old organ-grinder, whom she had followed.

Sam took care to tell how healthy she looked and how neatly she was dressed. Then he told how he accompanied the organ-grinder and the child to the "Prince's Feathers," from which she had followed the old man, and how he found Mollie Morris there, engaged as a barmaid.

He related how the woman had told him a tissue of falsehoods, artfully mixed with some few truths, all to the effect that Mrs. Carew, after her marriage, had utterly deserted the child, leaving her and her nurse dependent upon

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the charity of Mr. Wilks, who finally obliged them to leave the house together.

Sam very briefly told her how he had persuaded Mollie Morris to move to London, and left her comfortably settled in a lodging-house, and how he had written a long letter home to his mother to let her know where Mollie and little Musette were living, in case they should be wanted; and also that they were both, as well as himself, comfortable and happy. He had left this letter with Mollie to post when he went to sea.

"She never posted it. The traitress never posted it, and never intended to do so. If she had, what years of agony I should have been saved! But go on. For Heaven's sake, go on!" exclaimed Musa.

"That was the last I saw of Mollie or little Musette. I went on my voyage, and was gone three years. I returned about a month ago, and as soon as I could leave the ship I came up to London to look for Mollie and Musette. I went to Wellington Street, Strand, where I left them, but they were no longer there. Strangers were in the house who could tell me nothing about them."

"Lost in London! Do you mean to tell me that my child is lost in London?" wildly exclaimed Musa, all her hopes suddenly destroyed.

"Oh, no, dear Mrs. Carew; we shall find them. Mollie has prospered, most likely, and is keeping a lodging-house somewhere in a better part of the town. I know we shall find them. I have not the least fear, particularly now that Mr. Carew is here to take measures for their discovery," said Sam confidently, adding: "I am sure they are here in London, all right."

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CHAPTER XXXII.

HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF MONTCALLA.

At this moment a waiter entered and presented a card:

"THE DUKE OF MONTCALLA."

"Bertie!" said Musa to herself, with a gleam of joy lighting up the darkness of her mood. "Where is the gentleman?" she inquired.

"In the reading-room, Madam."

"Show him up here, if you please."

"You will please excuse me now, Mrs. Carew, and I will go and look up that tailor Mr. Carew recommended to me," said Sam, nervously arising, for he did not like the idea of meeting a stranger, especially a "live duke."

"Yes, go, Sam; but return as soon as you can. You are to sleep here to-night, you know."

Sam made his escape about two minutes before the Duke of Montcalla was announced. He entered and crossed the room to Musa.

"Bertie! Oh, I am so glad to see you!" exclaimed Musa, hastening to meet him.

"Welcome to England, fair sister," said the young Duke, cordially pressing the hands that she gave him.

"And I am so glad to congratulate you on a piece of news that I saw announced in the *Times*," said Musa, when they were seated side by side on the sofa.

"My forthcoming marriage with my little Welsh cousin? Yes, it will come off next month. You will probably

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receive cards as early as next week," said the young Duke.

"Thanks, dear Bertie. What is she like—this sweet Welsh cousin of yours? I know, of course, that she is

"'Queen-Rose of the Rosebud garden of girls,'

and all that. So you needn't give me a poetical description, but a statistical one—just such a description as the matter-of-fact official will put in your passport when you go abroad for your wedding tour," said Musa, archly.

"Well, Musa," replied Bertie, smiling, "to begin with, she is about nineteen years of age. She was a child in the nursery, when she was first set aside as the future wife of my elder brother. Since my brother passed away, it seems that the little girl has been reserved for me. I knew that, and I kept away from old Tremontane Hold for years. It was only by accident I met my sweet cousin, and—I loved her before I knew who she was," added the young man earnestly.

"Delightful," said Musa. "That was a conquest of which, under the circumstances, the very queen of hearts might have been vain."

"I do not think vanity possible in her soul. She is the loveliest——"

"Oh, yes, dear Bertie, I know—

"'She's all my fancy pictured her,
She's lovely—she's divine!'

I wish you much happiness, Bertie, dear."

"Thanks, I am sure you do. Your congratulations are more than lip deep, I know. But now, dear Musa, tell me of yourself, and your husband and child. I saw in the list

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of arrivals by the *Messenger*, 'Mr. and Mrs. August Carew, child, and two servants.'"

"August is well. He is engaged now with his chief."

"And now about the child?—A bouncing boy? A future president? All American boys, I believe, are prospective presidents."

"No, Bertie, I am sorry to say I have no boy. But really, without any maternal vanity, I may say that I have the loveliest little girl. But I will not describe my little fairy to you. I will let you judge for yourself," said Musa, with a smile, as she touched the bell.

Her own old, white-headed servant, Pendragon, answered it.

"Tell Cassy to bring Miss Ethelinde down," she directed.

In a few minutes the order was obeyed, and Cassy entered the room, courtesying, and leading the little girl by the hand.

The young Duke had always been used to the society of children, having had a houseful of little brothers and sisters of his own. And so he contrived to interest and amuse little Ethelinde for about half an hour, at the end of which time her mother sent her back to the nursery.

When they were once more alone together, Musa said:

"I have something to show you, Bertie."

And she went to a little cabinet that stood upon the side table and took from it a folded document, which she brought and put in her visitor's hand.

It was the certificate of her first marriage.

"Oh, I am *very* glad you have found this," said the young Duke, with so much earnestness that Musa gazed at him with surprise for a moment, and then asked:

"Of what possible importance can this *now* be, Bertie,

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except to place my honor beyond cavil before yourself and some few intimate friends who have heard of my claims as the sometime widow of your brother?"

"My dear Musa, your honor always has been 'beyond cavil,' and does not need this marriage certificate as a support. But there are other considerations. Let me explain them. You must understand, Musa, that my mother had an elder half-brother, known as the Hon. Donald Livingston. He went to India about half a century ago, and there amassed an enormous fortune. He never married; but some years before his death, he made a will leaving his entire estate to his nephew and namesake, Donald Livingston Caux, Earl of Cressy, and to *his heirs* forever. Not to his male heirs only. Failing boys, girls would inherit his estate. For some reason—procrastination, perhaps—Mr. Livingston never made another will, but died about two months ago, at the ripe age of seventy-five, leaving this old will in full force. We received the news of his death and of the only existing will about two weeks ago."

Musa had noticed at their first meeting that the young Duke was dressed in black, but that which had seemed to her American eyes a mere accident of taste, now became significant of bereavement.

"There was no necessity for a new will. Lord Cressy's brothers and sisters would naturally be his heirs," said Musa, gravely.

"Yes; had Cressy died childless and unmarried, we should have been so. But Cressy was married. He left a widow, and his widow, if childless by him, is entitled to one-half his princely estate. If he had left a child also, his widow would in that case have been entitled to one-third, and his child to the remaining two-thirds. Do you now understand, my fair sister?"

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"Yes; I understand too well. Ah, Heaven!" breathed the lady, with a suppressed moan.

Bertie looked at her in much commiseration. He had watched her with affectionate solicitude throughout the whole interview. And he had not failed to notice, under all her superficial affability and cheerfulness, a deep undercurrent of sadness. He heard her sigh profoundly, even while she caressed her beautiful and happy little Ethelinde. And now he observed that as soon as he had alluded to any possibility of her marriage with the Earl of Cressy having been blessed with a child, such a cloud of sorrow swept over her face as he had never seen there before.

"Musa, my dear," he said, "I sometimes think that you have not entirely confided in me. I do not wish to force your confidence, dear. I have suspected that there might have been a child born of your marriage with Cressy. I kept my suppositions to myself. I could not solicit your confidence *then*, my sister, nor should I do so *now*, but for some circumstances that have come to my knowledge, and the fact of this large estate having been left, two-thirds of which belong to Cressy's child, if there is one."

As he spoke Musa buried her face in her handkerchief, and sobbed aloud.

"Oh, forgive me! I distress you," said Bertie, anxiously.

"You are right," she said, as soon as she could speak through her sobs. "You are right. I had a child, or rather a seraph! Oh, Bertie! You have seen my little Ethelinde, my bright, joyous one, whom I call my fairy, and my sunbeam! And you thought her beautiful exceedingly, I know. But you never saw my little Musette!"

"'*Musette!*'" echoed the young Duke, suddenly.

"Yes, Musette! It was the soft diminutive of my own

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name, and it seemed to suit my tender, gentle darling. Oh, Bertie, if ever a seraph of love was incarnated on this earth, it was my meek, loving little Musette!"

Here Musa's emotions so utterly overcame her that she gave way to a burst of passionate sobs and tears.

As soon as she regained her composure, Musa told the Duke of Montcalla the story of little Musette's abduction and her supposed loss at sea.

"Oh, Bertie," she added, "for five years I mourned my meek angel, as only a mother in my circumstances could mourn her lost child—with an inconsolable sorrow, deepened by an infinite remorse! But only this morning, Bertie, I met one who knew my little Musette, and had seen her and her treacherous nurse in London three years ago."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed the young Duke, his countenance lighting up with some hidden unexpressed hope. But before he could speak again the door opened and Mr. Carew entered, accompanied by General ——— and young Samuel Carew, as we must henceforth call the heir of Pirate's Peak and Raven Rocks.

Musa, in rising to receive the guests, artfully turned, so as to bring her face within the shadow of the blue satin window curtains and to conceal or soften the traces of recent agitation. The minister advanced and shooks hands with Mrs. Carew. At the same moment Mr. Carew greeted Bertie.

The necessary introductions were made, and the usual courteous salutations were exchanged. When Bertie was about to take leave, he said:

"I hope you have no engagement for to-morrow morning?"

"None whatever. We are at your service for the whole

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day, if you please," answered Mr. Carew, speaking for the whole party.

"Then I am about to do an unusual thing. I am about to invite myself to lunch with you and Mrs. Carew, and also to ask permission to bring a little protégé of mine," said Bertie.

"Delightful!" answered Mr. and Mrs. Carew, in one voice.

"We lunch at two o'clock, usually; but we will fix any other hour you may prefer," added Musa, cordially.

"Pray do not change the hour. I will report myself punctually at two," answered Bertie, as he bowed and retired.

General ——— soon after took leave. Sam went out to receive some parcels that had been sent home for him. And the husband and wife were left alone together.

"Oh, August!" said Musa, throwing herself down beside her husband on the sofa and dropping her head on his shoulder, "I have heard such news to-day!"

"News! my darling?"

"Such news, August!"

"Good or bad, Musa?"

"Very good news! the very best news! The worst news!" she answered confusedly, and then she told him all that she had heard from Sam about Musette and Mollie Morris, and ended by saying:

"But send for him and ask him yourself. And oh, August," she pleaded, clasping her hands and looking prayerfully in his eyes, "oh, August, find my darling for me!"

"If she is on earth, she shall be found!" exclaimed Mr. Carew. "But I must question the boy," he added, as he rang the bell.

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"Go to Master Carew's room and ask him to come here immediately," was the order that he gave to old Pendragon, who had answered the bell.

Samuel Carew soon entered.

"My dear boy," said Musa, "I want you to detail to Mr. Carew all the circumstances of your meeting with little Musette, and of your residence with Mollie Morris, and your parting with the woman and child, when you went on your last voyage."

"Yes, Madam," answered Sam, taking the seat that Mr. Carew silently pointed out to him.

The youth then began and related the story in detail, from the moment of his finding Musette asleep on the old organ-grinder's knees, at a street corner in Liverpool, to the moment, seven weeks later, that he kissed her good-bye in the lodging-house in London, when he went on his voyage.

Mr. Carew let the boy tell the story straight through without interruption. At the close he began to question him. Sam's answers were clear and satisfactory, so far as they went.

"But," he added, "Mollie Morris had moved away from the lodging-house where he had left her with Musette, and he had not been able to find a trace of either the woman or child since his return to England."

"That will do, my boy. We will take immediate steps for the recovery of little Musette."

So saying, he sat down to his writing-table, and rapidly wrote out half a dozen advertisements, offering a large reward for news of a woman named Mary Morris, and a child named Musette, who three years before lived in a lodging-house, at No. — Wellington Street, Strand.

"There, my boy, call a hansom cab, and take these ad-

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vertisements around to the *Times, Chronicle, Standard,* and other morning papers. Have them inserted at once. Then drive to Scotland Yard and ask for the chief, and request him to call here, or to send a good detective—the best one he can get," said Mr. Carew, when he had finished his task.

Samuel Carew eagerly undertook this mission, and hastened away to accomplish it.

"What do you think of our chances of success?" inquired Musa, very anxiously.

"I think them very good," answered August, as encouragingly as he could speak.

"Then I have another subject to speak to you of, dear husband—one that I shrink from broaching," said Musa, hesitatingly.

"What is that, dearest? And why should you shrink from broaching it to me?" affectionately inquired August.

"Because it is the subject of my former marriage," answered Musa, in a low, hesitating voice.

"Well, dearest, what of that?"

"It may become my duty to establish the validity of that first marriage."

"Upon what new account?"

"This: There has been an immense fortune of several millions of pounds sterling left to the late Earl of Cressy and his heirs."

"And you want your portion of that fortune? My dear, have we not enough of this world's goods?"

"*We* have enough. And our daughter Ethelinde will be a very rich heiress. But little Musette, if she be found, will have nothing. She can inherit nothing of ours, because she is not the child of our marriage. But if I establish the validity of my first marriage, which I can easily

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do now, having the marriage certificate and all the letters written to me by the late Earl of Cressy, then, indeed, my darling, if found, instead of being a nameless little pauper, will come into her title of courtesy as an earl's daughter, and into a dower of several million pounds sterling. August, have I any right by inaction to deprive my meek, beautiful darling of all her birthrights as the granddaughter of a duke, the daughter of an earl and the heiress of a nabob, and leave her—as she will be, if found—the nameless and penniless child of questionable birth?" earnestly urged Musa.

Mr. Carew did not reply at once. He seemed buried in reflection.

"And yet, my beloved, my adored husband, if it be your will that I shall remain inactive I will do so. You have made all the strength and comfort and joy of my life. And I will let no interest, however dear, clash with your will or my devotion," added Musa, with deep feeling.

He drew her to his side and kissed her tenderly, as he said:

"I never doubted your devotion, even in the darkest of days, my peerless wife; and cannot begin to do so now. But, Musa, if your little Musette should be found, as I trust in Heaven she may be, it will become your sacred duty to establish the validity of your former marriage with the late Earl of Cressy, at whatever cost to your feelings or mine. Justice must be done to the child."

"Heaven bless you, my dear husband! Heaven make me worthy of you—if that be possible!" said Musa, with much emotion. "But oh, that my darling may be found! Oh, that she may be found!" she added, with fervent sighs.

As she said this, there came a rap at the door, followed

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by the entrance of a waiter, who announced that there was a "person" below, who asked to see Mr. Carew.

"Show him up," said that gentleman.

When the waiter had left the room to do his errand, August turned to Musa and said:

"It is some one from Scotland Yard, my dear. And you had better retire, perhaps."

Musa immediately arose and went into her bedroom. A few moments passed and the detective from Scotland Yard entered the room, bowed, gave his name as "Ketchum," and presented a note from his chief.

Mr. Carew invited the bearer to be seated.

The note was from the chief of police at Scotland Yard, to introduce Mr. John Ketchum, whom it represented to be the most skillful and successful detective in the force.

Mr. Carew was closeted with this detective for more than two hours, during which he gave him a full description of the woman and the child, with a detailed history of the abduction, and an account of their residence in London three years previous.

Then he gave him a check for a hundred pounds and directions to spare no expense in his search for the missing parties, and so sent him away.

As soon as the man was gone, Mr. Carew opened the door leading to the next room, and called Musa.

She hastened to meet him.

"Well, my dearest, I have secured the services of perhaps the most adroit detective in the world, John Ketchum, of Scotland Yard," said August, when they were once more seated together.

"Yes, I have heard of his wondrous skill—almost like magic," replied Musa.

"He it was who traced out the 'Red Mill Murder,' and

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brought the assassin to justice. And it was he who recovered the great Albemarle diamond, stolen from the premises of Messrs. Rayburn, jewellers, Oxford Street."

"Yes, yes, August; I have heard of those cases. I know something of what the man has done for *others*, but what can he do for *us*—oh, what *can* he do for us?" breathlessly demanded Musa.

"My dearest, he says that if the child is living, and in London, he will produce her in a week. If she is not in London, yet anywhere in the United Kingdom, he will find her in a month. He is confident of success."

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

HOW MUSA MET MUSETTE.

THE next day was the first of June. It was a very fine morning, even in London.

Musa, profoundly anxious as she was concerning the fate of her lost child, yet contrived to interest herself in superintending the arrangements of a very elegant lunch-table, to do honor to her dear friend, though self-invited guest, the young Duke of Montcalla.

It was just a quarter to two o'clock P. M., when the door of the drawing-room was thrown open by old Cornwallis, who, in his own peculiar "gold-stick-in-waiting" style, announced:

"The Duke of Montcalla."

And Bertie entered the room, leading by the hand a lovely little girl about seven years of age, dressed in white from head to foot.

Musa arose and walked forward to receive her guest. She had forgotten that he was to bring "a little protégé." She scarcely now saw the little girl. Her eyes were raised to the young Duke's face, and her hand was extended to greet him with a pleasant "Good-morning."

"Will you welcome my little protégé now, Musa?" inquired Bertie.

She cast her eyes down on the child—started—gazed—paled—flushed—and then—

"MUSETTE! Oh, my God, I thank Thee!"

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And she sank down upon her knees, and clasped the child to her heart, almost broken under its burden of unutterable joy and gratitude. Her cry brought August Carew out from his study.

Mr. Carew saw this group—Musa kneeling on the floor, with a white-robed child clasped to her heart, her head bent over the little one's form, her bosom heaving with deep sobs of joy. And beside them Bertie, holding up his hand in an admonitory manner.

Mr. Carew took in the situation at a glance. He advanced and offered his hand to Bertie, who received and pressed it in silence. Musa was lost to everything in the universe except her recovered child.

"Musette! Musette! Oh, my God, I thank Thee!" broke again in a rapture of deep gratitude and reverence from her lips, as she raised and threw back her head, panting, gasping as if her soul would have burst forth in that profound aspiration of thankfulness.

She did not wonder how the child had been recovered. It was enough at that moment that she felt and saw her there.

And little Musette, the wondering and pitying child?

There was ineffable tenderness and compassion in her dark eyes, as they rested on the eloquent face of the beautiful lady kneeling before her; but there was no intuitive knowledge of that lady's near relationship to herself. With little Musette, however, pity was always the nearest kin to love. And love was the key-note of all her life's harmony. So she gazed on the weeping beauty in wonder and pity for a while. And then her little white-gloved hands, like two little white doves, flew out and hovered around Musa's neck, and her soft, pathetic voice murmured:

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"Don't cry, lady, I love you. Oh, indeed I *do* love you."

This was too much for the mother's overwrought heart.

"You love me, my seraph, you love me?" she cried, dropping her head once more over the form of the child and breaking into a shower of tears.

And little Musette's hands hovered around her face and tried to wipe the tears from her eyes, as she repeated her little Heavenly phrase:

"I love you, I *do* love you so much."

Then August Carew approached the group and laid his comforting hand upon the bowed head of his wife as he said:

"My own dear Musa, my heart shares your deep joy at this hour, and goes up with yours in fervent thanksgiving for this happy restoration. But, my dearest, try now to recover yourself, and control your emotions. See, you distress this sweet child, who is doing her best to soothe you. Children don't understand tears of joy. She thinks that you are in trouble. Let me help you to rise."

And he took her hand tenderly and assisted her to her feet.

She still held the child closely clasped to her side with one hand and arm, while she raised the other hand to her own bewildered brow, and ran the fingers through the dark ringlets of her hair, as she stood gazing at her husband, as if she scarcely recognized him.

She seemed indeed almost bereft of her reason, by the suddenness and excess of her joy.

"Have I passed away from the earth and met my child in the World of Spirits at last? She would be seven years old in Heaven now. And, oh, her beauty is celestial and her garments are white! Have I met Musette in the Spirit

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Land, I wonder, or am I still in the flesh, on Earth?" she said, looking strangely at her husband and still clasping her child.

"You are here by my side, Musa, my dear wife. Try to collect your faculties and steady your nerves. You have borne grief heroically. Do not sink under joy. Take your little Musette by the hand, and let me lead you to your room, and in its seclusion you can get accustomed to your happiness and compose yourself," said August, in a low, admonitory tone, as he conducted the lady and the child to the adjoining chamber, put them gently in at the door, and closed it after them.

Then he turned to the young Duke with some attempted apology for Musa's want of self-control. Bertie said:

"Who can wonder at anything that we have seen? The shock, joyful as it was, was yet enough to have killed her. The fault was mine. I should have prepared her for this meeting. Though, indeed, until this hour I was by no means certain that this lovely little girl was really her lost Musette. I only suspected and hoped that the little waif I have had under my care for the last two years might be the missing child. And now I suppose you would like to hear how I came to be in possession of this lovely little girl?"

"Certainly, just as soon as you feel disposed to tell me."

"I feel so now. It is rather a pathetic story. Therefore I would prefer to relate it to yourself alone. You can afterward repeat as much or as little of it as you see fit to your wife."

As the two gentlemen conversed, they approached the upper end of the room, where the little golden-haired and blue-eyed elf, Ethelinde, sat half hidden in the depths of a large cushioned chair, and looking out with wonder-

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widened eyes at all that she had seen and failed to comprehend.

"Ah, sweetheart, is it you? How do you do? Do you still like me? Will you give me a kiss?" gayly inquired Bertie, lifting the bright fairy in his arms.

"Yes, of course I like you," frankly replied Ethelinde, giving the customary proof. "But what little girl was that you brought here? And what made mamma kneel down and cry?"

"What shall I say to the child?" gravely inquired the young Duke, as he set her upon her feet again, and looked in droll perplexity toward Mr. Carew.

"Ethelinde, run right away to mamma. She is in her bedroom, and she will tell you all about your dear little sister," said August, turning the child around and pointing to the chamber door.

"My little sister! Oh! Is she my little sister?" panted the child, eagerly, her bright blue eyes dancing with delight.

"Yes, indeed, she is your little sister—your own dear little sister. Run and see her. The Duke here brought her to you this morning. Run away now and see her," answered her father, hurrying her off.

Away darted Ethelinde, like some bright bird through the space, to find that ardently-desired blessing of every little, only daughter's heart—a little sister companion.

"Now for your story, Duke. I am really very much interested to learn how you first discovered the child," said August.

"It is now two years since, near the close of a sunny day, in the height of the season, I was driving in from Kensington, and had reached Oxford Street, on my way to my club.

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"I had reached the corner of Regent Street, when I witnessed an occurrence that curdled my blood. I saw the tiniest little girl that ever held a toy broom, trying to sweep the crossing. She was about half-way across the street when she started to get out of the way of a heavy van, and at the same instant fell under my horses' feet before I could pull up.

"The carriage was stopped. The child was lifted up, insensible, by my servant, and laid, by my orders, upon my knees—a little pale, pathetic form, wonderfully clean for a little crossing-sweeper, and clothed in well-patched garments. I thought the child was only stunned or fainting. So I dispatched a messenger to summon our own family physician, and I gave the order to drive gently back to Montcalla Lodge."

"That child was Musette, then?"

"Yes. When I reached Montcalla Lodge, I sent for my esteemed maiden aunt, Lady Etheldreda Caux, and for our worthy old housekeeper, Barnes. I informed Lady Etheldreda that I had run over and nearly killed the child, and that she must be tenderly cared for. And I laid her in the motherly arms of Barnes.

"To do my prim maiden aunt justice, she received this little charge with great compassion, and had her put to bed comfortably.

"Our physician arrived promptly, and went up to examine the little patient. And I awaited the result of the examination with great anxiety.

"At length the doctor came down, and his report relieved me very much. He said that there were no serious injuries, either internal or external. The child had received a severe shock to her nervous system, and would require perfect rest and good treatment for a few days.

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That was absolutely all. And the doctor went away, promising to look in again the next morning.

"As soon as my mind was relieved in regard to the child, I thought of the business that had taken me out in the earlier part of the afternoon. And I ordered the brougham and left the house to transact it.

"I returned just before dinner. I thought I would like to see the injured child, so I went up to look at her. She was in one of the smaller spare bedrooms, lying in a dainty little white bed. Her little black-haired head lay well up on the pillow; her cheeks were bright with fever. I thought I had never seen a prettier child.

"I took the little feverish hand and spoke to her. But she gazed on me without answering, and began to babble at random in a sweet, bird-like voice:

"'Pennies, mammy! So many pennies for sweeping. See! see! So many pennies! Buy tea, mammy! Buy sugar!'

"'Has she been long like this?' I inquired of the housemaid, who was watching beside her.

"The girl answered that the child had been 'rambling in her mind' ever since six o'clock.

"But soon the child's bird-like tones sank and changed into the deepest pathos, as she murmured, slowly:

"'My—poor—mammy. My—poor—mammy.'

"Her pathetic voice went to my heart and roused my memory. I recollected then what I ought never to have forgotten—that this child had friends who ought to have been quickly advised of her whereabouts and condition.

"I left the room, urging the housemaid to take the best care of her, and I went down-stairs and dispatched a messenger to the scene of the accident to make investigations.

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"It was late at night before my messenger returned. He said that he had experienced some difficulty in doing his errand, and had been obliged to call in the aid of a detective-policeman before he succeeded in finding the poor child's miserable home, over a junk-shop, in the neighborhood of Drury Lane.

"He further reported that he found the mother in destitute circumstances, and in a dying condition. She was so low, indeed, that she could scarcely be made to understand that the child had been lost, and was found, and was safe.

"The next morning I went to my aunt, and told her the piteous story of the destitute and dying mother, and of this mere babe going out to sweep the crossing, and of her delirious babbling about 'sweeping' and 'pennies,' and 'tea,' and her 'poor—dear—mammy.'

"Lady Etheldreda wept. Her charities were known far and wide. She ordered her brougham, had it stocked with tea, sugar, wine, jelly, and everything else that her experience taught her might be acceptable to the sick woman, and taking her maid with her, she drove down to the wretched neighborhood and to the miserable room that little Musette had called her home.

"There she found the woman Morris in full as destitute a condition as had been reported. But so ill as to be almost indifferent or insensible to surroundings.

"Lady Etheldreda caused her to be at once and carefully removed to the Westminster Hospital, where she could receive the very best treatment.

"The next day I accompanied Lady Etheldreda in her visit to this hospital, where we found the woman somewhat better. She seemed grateful for our care of little Musette, and anxious to be reunited to the child.

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"When, however, we explained that the little one was not well enough to be brought to her that day, she grew very uneasy, and continued to murmur from time to time:

"'Lord forgive me my great sin—Lord forgive me my great sin!'

"And when we were about to take leave of her, she raised her fading eyes to mine, and asked:

"'Do you think the Lord will forgive me a great sin, when I am so sorry that I did it?'

"'Most certainly, He will,' I answered; 'but I will send a minister to you, who will tell you better than I can of the Lord's tender mercy and loving kindness.'

"'It is—about—the child,' she said, her breath coming shorter and shorter. 'It is—about—Musette. She is—not my own child—she is a little lady.'

"Saying this, the woman drew a deep sigh of relief. It was her last breath."

"Dead?" inquired Mr. Carew.

"Yes, dead. Her end, you see, was much nearer than we knew. We gave directions for a decent funeral, and then returned to Montcalla House—I, with the firm resolve to educate and provide for the little seraph that I had nearly run down and trampled to death in Oxford Street.

"When little Musette was able to leave her bed and walk about her room, her pleadings to go home to her 'poor, dear mammy' were almost heart-rending.

"Then Lady Etheldreda took the child upon her lap and told her that the good Saviour had taken her poor sick mammy to Heaven, and had made her well and happy, and given her everything she wanted. And that her mammy would never be poor, or sick, or hungry, or cold, or sorry any more, but would live among the holy and happy angels

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in the light of the Lord's love, forever. All this the child's heart received as pure truth.

"The dying woman had said, with her last breath, that this child was not her own—that this child was a little lady. And every look, gesture and tone of little Musette proved her indeed to be a little lady of the most refined, the sweetest and loveliest nature. And as a little lady I resolved to have her brought up.

"Even Lady Etheldreda recognized the child's gentle and noble nature, and felt no hesitation in introducing her into the nursery and school-room of my little sisters.

"'She must be made to understand, however, that the woman Morris, whom she called her "mammy," was not her mother, but only her nurse, and she must then be allowed to forget her, if it be possible,' said my aunt.

"And I agreed with her; for I was so pleased to see her receive the forlorn child so readily, that I would have agreed to almost anything she might have proposed.

"The child was therefore told that the poor 'mammy' she mourned was not her own mother, but *only* her 'mammy' or nurse. And that some day she might see her own mother.

"Now this revelation might have set another child to asking awkward questions, that none of us could have answered. But this meek little girl received whatever we told her as truth and asked no further information.

"'I love my poor, dear mammy,' she said, very tenderly; that was all.

"And then she was introduced into the nursery and the school-room of my little sisters. I have four of them—Edith, aged twelve, Maude and Berthe, twins, aged ten, and little Constance, aged eight.

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"These children were very fond of pets, and had any number of birds, puppies, kittens, and so forth. But I will venture to say they never had a pet they welcomed with so much delight, and loved with so much devotion, as little Musette. They were emulous as to who should show the little stranger the most affectionate attention. They pressed upon her their prettiest dolls, pictures, books, toys and pets.

"I thought that the child herself was only a new toy or a new pet in the nursery, and that these children would soon grow tired of their idol.

"But no; it was not so. Little Musette, with her fond, unselfish nature, returned their affection with so much love that she completely and forever won their hearts.

"And the sad-eyed child grew bright and happy among them.

"She has been their inseparable companion for the last two years, sharing their studies and their pastimes; remaining with them at Montcalla Lodge during the spring and early summer months; going with them to Brighton in July, to Scotland in September, and to Caux Castle for the Christmas holidays.

"I taught her to call me uncle, not knowing how near the truth I came. And this morning I told her that I was going to bring her here to introduce her to a lady friend. And I brought her. My story is finished, Mr. Carew," said the young Duke, abruptly cutting short his discourse, as he saw the chamber-door open and Musa re-enter the parlor, leading her two little girls, one in each hand.

"And you must receive my heartfelt, lifelong thanks for all your saving care of our forlorn child," said Mr. Carew, with much emotion, as he arose and took the young man's hand and earnestly pressed it.

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Musa came directly up to Bertie, with tearful eyes and radiant smile, holding out her hand, and saying:

"To think I have not even thanked you yet for the great happiness you have brought me, Bertie! But, oh! believe me, that the profound, eternal gratitude I feel can never be expressed, and never be lessened!"

"Nonsense, my fair sister! Nobody owes me any thanks. I did but please myself in taking care of this sweet little girl, before I ever suspected her to be your daughter and my niece. I congratulate you with all my heart on her recovery," said the young Duke, cordially shaking the hand she had offered him.

"I will not ask you yet by what happy chance you found her," said Musa, who was still utterly ignorant whether little Musette had been under her young uncle's care a day, a month, or a year.

"No, do not ask me now, dear Musa. I have told Mr. Carew the whole story, and he will tell it you at some convenient time," Bertie gravely answered.

"I will tell you all about it to-night, Musa," added August.

"That will do. It is quite enough for me at present to know that I have the child," said Musa, bending her head in reverential gratitude.

At that moment young Samuel Carew entered the room, and bowed to the Duke.

He turned and stared at the strange little girl for half a moment, and, recognizing her by her beautiful eyes, he ran across the room, seized her little hand, gazed at her, and then snatched her up and kissed her heartily, exclaiming:

"Musette! you have forgotten me again! I knew you would. How could you remember so long, poor little soul?

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Oh, you 'll soon know me again though, and you 'll feel as you had known me all your life. And so you have, mostly," added Sam, as he set the astonished child on her feet once more.

"You knew her as I did, in a moment, Sam," said Mrs. Carew.

"Why, yes! Who could ever forget her eyes? But, oh, I say! Didn't old Ketchum make short work of finding her?" he inquired in surprise..

"The detective did not find her. The Duke of Montcalla brought our little girl to us this morning. You shall hear the whole story by and by, Sam," Musa explained.

"And, oh! by the way, I had forgotten," put in the young Duke, jocosely, "I think I may claim that munificent reward offered for the recovery of the lost child! How much was it? Two hundred pounds, or five hundred!"

Before any one could reply "in kind" to Bertie's pleasantries, the folding doors, leading into the dining-room, were thrown open, and old Cornwallis appeared and announced that—

"Madam is served."

Bertie gave his arm to Musa to conduct her to the table. August led little Musette by the hand, and Sam followed with Ethelinde.

"I think," said Musa, with a smile, as she took her seat at the head of the table—"I think that the occasion may permit the presence of the children at our lunch-table for once."

"I think the occasion decidedly calls for them," added August.

"And *I* think they complete a very well arranged little

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lunch party. We are just three ladies and three gentlemen," concluded Bertie.

The lunch passed off very pleasantly. And when the first bottle of Johannesberg was opened, and all the glasses filled around, Bertie, glass in hand, arose and said:

"The doubtful old custom of drinking health has passed into disuse, except at public dinners. Yet I wish to propose a health that lies close to my heart." He paused and looked around upon the small, expectant party, then bowed courteously to his hostess and to the little girl by her side, as he gravely added:

"The Countess of Cressy and the Lady Musette Caux."

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

MUSA'S TRIUMPH.

VERY soon after lunch was over, the young Duke of Montcalla took leave of his friends.

That night, when the two little girls had gone to bed, Mr. Carew, seated with his wife and his ward, told the story of little Musette's life in London, and her rescue by her uncle, as it had been told him by Bertie himself.

And in listening to the relation of the sweet child's sufferings and labors of love, Musa dropped the very last tears she was ever required to shed for little Musette.

The next morning the young Duke called again, bringing with him his youngest sister, Constance. Leaving "Connie" with the two little girls, under the charge of Musa, Bertie drew August off to the latter's study for a private interview. They were closeted together for more than an hour.

The subject of their conversation was Musa and Musette, and their common interests. And during that interview, it was fully determined between the two gentlemen that, for little Musette's sake, Musa must acknowledge and establish her first marriage—namely, with the late Earl of Cressy.

And it was arranged that on the following day the two little girls, Musette and Ethelinde, should be sent under the charge of their nursery governess to Montcalla Lodge, to spend the day with their young relatives there. And

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that Mr. and Mrs. Carew should meet the Duke of Montcalla at the chambers of the family solicitors, Messrs. Coke & Coke, of the Inner Temple.

I will not bore my readers by detailing the legal proceedings that occupied our friends for the following nine days.

It may be sufficient to say that at the end of that period Musa Carew was accepted as the Countess of Cressy, and Musette as the lawful daughter and heiress of the late Earl of Cressy. And the India fortune was turned over to them.

"But oh, August," said Musa, as they talked together, in their drawing-room, when all this had been accomplished, "I feel as if I were disloyal to your name and disloyal to all my Republican principles in accepting and using this title."

"My dear Musa," said Mr. Carew, smiling, "but for the interests involved, it would be of the least possible importance to you, or to me, whether you should be called Mrs. Carew, or the Countess of Cressy. In using the title, however, you will please me and do my will. You will not lose your own name, of course. You are still Musa Carew, as well as Countess of Cressy. The title is not your name, but a mere title of courtesy. It is necessary for little Musette's interests that you should assume it. It will also serve you well, while you live in this title-loving community. If you do not like it, when we get back to America, you can drop it, of course. It will be at your own option even there."

"Well, dear August," said Musa, smiling brightly, "since this pleases you, it really pleases me. I should be more or less than woman if it did not. Perhaps I shall not drop it even in America. Perhaps I may retain it even

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there, if only on account of those women who, years ago, maligned me. And, by the way, I wonder what has become of Armida Sutton? Her poor mother has not heard from her for many months."

Before Mr. Carew could think of any answer to this difficult question, the door was thrown open, and the old, white-headed negro, Cornwallis, in his most dignified manner, announced:

"LADY DREADFUL COUGH!"

And before Musa could get over the effect of this astounding annunciation, Lady Etheldreda Caux entered the room.

Her ladyship was tall, swarthy and dark-haired, and alarmingly like her brother, the late Duke. She was richly but plainly dressed in carriage costume.

Musa arose and received her ladyship very gracefully, and then presented Mr. Carew.

Lady Etheldreda resembled her late brother, the grim old Duke, in personal appearance only. In character and disposition she was very different from him. She had now come in person to invite August and Musa to dine at Montcalla Lodge on the following Saturday.

"It will be a family party only, my dear Countess," said Lady Etheldreda, in explanation. "And we wish Mr. Carew and yourself to meet the Dowager Marchioness of Llangollen, and her daughter, Lady Gwendolyn Newydd, who is betrothed, as perhaps you are aware, to my nephew Montcalla."

Musa bowed assent, and Lady Etheldreda continued:

"The Marchioness has come up to her town-house on Westbourne Terrace, for the wedding, which will come off within a month. We may expect you on Saturday evening

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to meet our Welsh friends, I hope," added her ladyship, rising to take leave.

As August and Musa had no engagement for Saturday evening, they accepted the invitation as frankly as it was given, and promised to go.

When Lady Etheldreda Caux had left, Musa turned to her husband, crimson with mortification, and said:

"Really, August, we must get an English footman in place of old Cornwallis. He is so utterly ignorant. Just think of the way in which he announced Lady Etheldreda Caux!"

August broke down and laughed heartily, partly at the remembrance of that stunning performance, and partly at Musa's look of dismay in speaking of it.

"You are much too sensitive, my dear Musa. There is no harm done. Besides, you might not improve matters by changing old Cornwallis for an English servant. These latter, also, make inconvenient mistakes. Witness the flunkey who lately petrified an evening party at Argyle House by announcing the Honorable Eustace De la Flote, as 'Mr. De'il afloat!' But perhaps," added August, archly, "though old Cornwallis was quite good enough for Mrs. Carew, he may not be equal to the requirements of the Countess of Cressy."

"Oh, August!" exclaimed Musa, with a blush and a laugh.

And after that, no more was ever said about changing Cornwallis for an English servant.

On Saturday, as by engagement, August and Musa went to dine at Montcalla Lodge, and to meet the Welsh Marchioness and her daughter.

This, be it remembered, was the first occasion upon which Musa had made a visit since her arrival in England.

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And thus quietly, on this evening of the family reunion at Montcalla Lodge, she entered their society for the first time as Countess of Cressy.

Musa was charmed by the affectionate reception she met with from the Welsh Marchioness. And she found her daughter, Lady Gwendolyn, quite as lovely as her betrothed husband had represented her to be.

And after a very delightful evening spent at Montcalla Lodge, August and Musa returned to their hotel.

Musa's second appearance in society, under her title, was at a grand ball given by the Marchioness of Llangollen, at her town-house in Westbourne Terrace, in honor of the approaching marriage of her daughter, Lady Gwendolyn Newydd, with the Duke of Montcalla.

Musa was now but twenty-six years of age, And the splendor of her dark beauty, enhanced now by the loveliness of love and the light of joy, was more glorious than it had ever been in her life before.

The Countess of Cressy was the belle of that ball, and from that evening she was cited as the most beautiful woman in London.

Later in the month the marriage of the Duke of Montcalla and Lady Gwendolyn Newydd was celebrated at St. George's, Hanover Square. It was said to be the most beautiful as well as the most magnificent wedding of the season.

It was Lady Gwendolyn's pleasure to be attended to the altar by a train of bride's-maids formed of children only. They were six in number, namely, the bride's own and only sister, Lady Winnifred Newydd, a little maiden of fourteen springs, the bridegroom's four young sisters, the Ladies Maude, Edith, Berthe, and Constance Caux, and lastly, his niece, our own little Lady Musette.

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The bride was splendidly arrayed in a rich white grosgrain silk, with an over-dress and veil of finest point lace, a wreath and bouquet of orange flowers, and the magnificent Montcalla diamonds.

The fairy train of little bride's-maids were uniformly dressed in white illusion over white silk, white sashes and bows, and white rose-bud wreaths and bouquets.

The youthful Marquis of Llangollen, the brother of the bride, was "best man," or, as we would call him, first groomsman to the bridegroom.

The ceremony was performed by a bishop, assisted by two deans.

After the ceremony the wedding party adjourned to Westbourne Terrace, where they partook of a sumptuous wedding breakfast given by the Marchioness of Llangollen, and where they viewed the costly wedding presents displayed in one of the reception-rooms.

There was a lengthy account of the marriage ceremonies and festivities in the next issue of the *Court Journal.* And among the names of the noble and distinguished guests appeared those of:

"Musa, Countess of Cressy, and Mr. Carew."

As the London season drew to a close, Lady Etheldreda Caux, with her little nieces and their maids and governesses, left town for Caux Castle. And, acting under the secret instructions of her idolized nephew, she invited August and Musa, with their two little girls and their ward, to join her autumn party at the castle.

August and Musa accepted the invitation, and with their family went North.

It was from Caux Castle that Musa wrote to her American friends and relations, telling them, for the first time, the secret of her first marriage and of the birth of her first

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child, and detailing to them all the events that, since her arrival in England, had led up to her recognition as the Countess of Cressy.

And in due time came back a budget of letters from America, each particular letter superscribed formally to the Countess of Cressy, and all filled with expressions of surprise and congratulations.

Among them, the most earnest and sincere in utterances of heartfelt good-will came from her old guardian, Mr. Lyttleton Locke, and from her devoted young friend, Clarice Howard. Mrs. Kate Carew's contrary acceptance of the news was characteristic.

"Countess of Cressy?" wrote Kate. "Pooh! What is that, when you might have been Duchess of Montcalla, had you so pleased?"

Musa laughed, and showed this letter to her husband.

"Well, my darling, I suppose, if you had not met me, you really would have married Bertie at last," said August, smiling.

"Never!" exclaimed Musa, energetically. "I was very fond of good Bertie in a sisterly way. And I am so still, bless his dear old heart! But I never could have entertained the thought of marrying the Earl of Cressy's brother."

"Well, my dearest, I, for one, quite approve of your sentiments," archly commented August.

And the conversation dropped.

There was yet one letter that Musa had not opened. It was from Mrs. Sutton, her housekeeper at Bay Beauty.

Musa took it from its envelope and began to read it with careless indifference; but as she read it, her interest awakened and deepened painfully.

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After wishing the Countess of Cressy and the little Lady Musette all manner of happiness in the enjoyment of their new fortune, and after informing her patroness that all was right and every one was well at Bay Beauty, the poor woman proceeded to say:

"But all is as wrong as ever it can be with my poor girl Armida. She has just come back to me a dreadful wreck of herself—utterly broken down in health and perfectly destitute in circumstances. That grand villain who pretended to marry her, had another wife all the time living on her own estate in Pomerania. And when he got tired of Armida, he just up and told her so, and turned her adrift. She is here with me now, Madam; but whether you will permit her to stay here, of course, I cannot tell. And whatever I am to do with her I am sure I do not know."

Musa paused long and thoughtfully over this letter, and then, to her honor be it written, she sat down and answered it before she replied to any of the others.

She told Mrs. Sutton to keep her unhappy daughter under her own protection at Bay Beauty as long as Armida might choose to remain, even if it should be for the term of her natural life. And she increased the housekeeper's salary, to enable the mother to provide the best medical attendance, as well as every comfort and luxury, for her invalid daughter.

A few days after mailing this letter to Mrs. Sutton, Musa received a very important communication from America that nearly took away her breath.

It was another long letter from her mother, Mrs. Kate Carew.

But we have room only for one short extract, which will, however, explain the whole:

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"You will be very much surprised, my dear Countess," wrote Kate, "to hear that, at the age of forty-five, I am about to be married for the third time.

"And to another old man, my darling. Old men are my fate. I cannot resist them. Or—they cannot resist me, which is it?

"A third old man! Just think of it! Not an old widower this time, however, and not a Carew. I have pretty well killed off all the unmarried and marriageable male Carews!

"Can you guess who the third unhappy man is to be?

"An old bachelor. Can you guess now?

"A rich old bachelor. *Now* you can guess.

"No? Then I shall have to tell you. Mr. Lyttleton Locke!

"Yes, Countess, I have actually brought down that wary old bird, and it has done me good. I am proud of the job.

"If the Whig candidate for the Presidency should be elected, Mr. Lyttleton Locke will be a member of the Whig cabinet, as Attorney-General. That would suit me very well. I could always tell him what to do, and he would have to do it. I should be 'the power behind the throne stronger than the throne.' Some women clamor about their rights. I quietly take mine—and other people's also.

"Well, my darling, we are to be married on the fifteenth of September, and immediately after the wedding we are to start for Europe. If we do not go down to the bottom of the ocean in the Equinoctial storms that may be expected about that time, we shall reach Havre about the first of October. We go first to Paris, thence to Marseilles, thence to Rome. We shall make quite an extended tour of the Continent.

"But we expect to be in London early in February, to witness the opening of Parliament.

"Will your house in Piccadilly be ready to receive us then? For naturally, you know, we shall come to our dear children."

"I declare," said Musa to herself, when she had finished reading this letter, "Kate is worse for marrying than Maggie Seaforth herself. Poor Maggie had the excuse of poverty and helplessness. Kate has none of these. I will write her a very sharp letter."

And she forthwith sat down and wrote:

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"Kate, you are getting into very bad habits. I feel forced to protest, like young Sam Seaforth, that I really can't stand so many stepfathers. No, ma'am. Mr. Lyttleton Locke will make the second that you have given me within the last five years. What do you mean by it? Do you intend to kill off all the fine old gentlemen in the country before you stop marrying, and consent to grow old? I declare that such is my regard for my honored old guardian, that I am tempted to go over and forbid the banns. I cannot bear the idea of having him added to crown the holocaust of your matrimonial victims."

Musa actually sent off this letter to Mrs. Kate Carew; but her laughing protestations were of no effect whatever. For early in September she received the wedding cards of Mr. and Mrs. Lyttleton Locke.

While these affairs were transpiring, the young heir of Raven Rocks and Pirate's Peak, under the direction of an accomplished private tutor, was studying diligently to make up for wasted years.

Early in January the Countess of Cressy and Mr. Carew took possession of their new house in Piccadilly, so as to be comfortably settled before the meeting of Parliament, and the gathering of fashion to the metropolis. The young Duke and Duchess of Montcalla also came up early in the season to Montcalla Lodge, Kensington. And the Marchioness of Llangollen, with her son, the youthful Marquis, came up to her town house on Westbourne Terrace.

At the first drawing-room of the season at Buckingham Palace there were two distinguished presentations. The first was that of the young Duchess of Montcalla, on her marriage. The second was that of the Countess of Cressy. Both these ladies were presented by the Marchioness of Llangollen.

And if the young Duchess was the more interesting on account of her bridal freshness, early youth, and high rank,

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the beautiful Countess was more effective upon other grounds. The splendor of her grand, dark, oriental style of beauty made the greatest impression of the day.

And thus, in this season as in the last, the Countess of Cressy was voted by all the clubs to be the most beautiful woman in England.

And the house of the Countess of Cressy and Mr. Carew, in Piccadilly, became one of the most distinguished centres of intellect, beauty and fashion in London.

Mr. and Mrs. Lyttleton Locke did not reach London as early in the season as they had expected to do. They had extended their travels farther and protracted their stay longer than they had intended. And thus it happened that they did not arrive until near the end of February. They came directly to the house of August and Musa in Piccadilly, and were very cordially received by their host and hostess.

Mr. Lyttleton Locke occupied himself chiefly in attending the debates in the House of Commons and the trials in the Westminster Courts.

Kate threw herself with all her soul into the whirl of fashionable life, enjoying it as if she had been but twenty-one instead of forty-five.

And Kate took a malicious pleasure in saving marked copies of the *Court Journal* that contained notices of the Countess of Cressy's beauty, elegance and wit, or of her brilliant parties, or of her appearance at this, that or the other royal state dinner or princely ball, and sending them over to Washington to those women who had once so cruelly maligned Musa.

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CHAPTER XXXV.

MUSETTE'S HAPPINESS.

And she will wed her earliest love—
One who in youngest childhood and ripe youth
Was ever hers; with whose advancing thought
She grew entwined; to whom, in time, she 'll yield
Her maiden coyness, and in mystic band
Will link herself, for aye—one heart, one life,
Blended together in the innermost soul.—H. ALFORD.

HAPPY lives have no history, it is said. And the lives of the people in whom I have been trying to interest you flowed on from this time forth so peacefully, that there is little to record of them for years to come.

And that little may be written in a few words.

First, the Whig candidate for the Presidency was not elected, so Mr. Lyttleton Locke was not made Attorney-General, and Mrs. Lyttleton Locke did not get the coveted opportunity of putting her jewelled finger into the political pie.

But they went back to Washington City, where Kate set up a magnificent establishment at the Poplars, entertained fashionable company, and spent the old lawyer's money extravagantly all the week, and dragged him to church three times every Sunday, and made him believe that he never knew how to live until she had taught him the way.

Mr. Lyttleton Locke is a very tough old gentleman, seasoned by fifty years of hardening in the legal profession. So I do not think that Kate will succeed in killing him

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very soon; or that she will ever have a fourth husband, or give Musa a third step-father.

The same may be said, by the way, of her humble rival in the matrimonial race—the very-much-married Maggie Wilks.

The Reverend Mr. Wilks is a sallow, bilious, melancholy subject, and therefore we know that because he has got no liver to speak of, he will live forever; and that Maggie will not have to add her lamentations for her "poor Jerry," to those for her "poor Jack," and her "poor Hal." And Sam will never be called upon to "stand" another step-father.

But to return to Kate.

In all her social intercourse in Washington, she had the good taste not to talk overmuch of her "daughter, the Countess of Cressy," except on occasions when she met any of those malicious women who had so basely slandered Musa in the past seasons; then, indeed, Kate gave the reins to her tongue and to her imagination, and let them run. And she must have been above, or below, the average of feminine human nature had she forborne to do so.

It was in the second year of their residence in London that Musa presented her husband with a fine boy, much to the delight of August, who, naturally enough, desired a son.

Mr. Carew's life career seemed to be decided. It was to be a diplomatic one, as that for which his genius and training best fitted him.

He remained attached to the American Legation in London until the recall of the Minister, in the autumn of the third year of his foreign civil service.

Then Mr. Carew and Musa, with their children and their ward, returned with the Legation to America.

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They reached Washington early in the winter, and took up their residence in their house on Vermont Avenue, which had been got ready for their reception under the supervision of Mrs. Chief-Justice Shrewsbury.

And Musa re-entered once more upon the rôle of a leader of fashion.

And Mrs. Lyttleton Locke's heart swelled with triumph as she saw how Musa was courted, followed and flattered by those very persons who had once so cruelly maligned her. Here Musa met her dear friends, Captain and Mrs. Philip Shrewsbury, who had kept the Vermont Avenue home warm for her during her long absence, and who still remained at the earnest desire of their hostess.

Samuel Carew had not accompanied his guardians to Washington, but had parted from them in New York to go up to Inwood and see his mother; and there, much to poor Maggie's delight, he became fully reconciled to his clerical step-father, and even continued his studies under the Reverend Mr. Wilks's directions.

Early in the following summer Mr. Carew and Musa went down to Bay Beauty, where they found everything in a prosperous and flourishing condition.

There Musa found her old treacherous enemy, Armida Sutton; an enemy no longer, but a poor, crushed, heart-broken and penitent woman, who could only be met with pity and pardon.

Musa kissed the seal of full forgiveness on her pale lips, and told her to live in peace with her mother, at Bay Beauty, as long as she should desire to do so.

And thus Armida found a warm home there for the rest of her life.

While staying at Bay Beauty, August and Musa renewed their affectionate intimacy with their old friends, Mr. and

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Mrs. Horace Howard, of "The Shoals." Clarice, in addition to her fair little boy, Percie, who was about the age of Musa's Ethelinde, had now a pretty little girl, whom she called Dora, after Musa's mother.

Early in June, Mr. and Mrs. Lyttleton Locke came down to Pirate's Peak to spend the summer.

And in July, Mrs. Chief-Justice and Captain and Mrs. Philip Shrewsbury arrived on a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Howard, at "The Shoals."

And Clarice, in her delight at this reunion, declared that with Musa there, and all the others, it was quite like old times.

But another flattering change was at hand for August and Musa.

In September of that year, Mr. Carew's distinguished talents as a diplomat were recognized, and his important services to his government, while he was attached to the American Legation at London, were rewarded by his appointment as Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Court of Austria, with instructions to proceed on his mission without delay.

Musa and August took leave of their friends, and with their children and servants went to New York to meet the United States ship *Nevada*, that was to take the new minister and his *suite* to Europe.

Before sailing, Mr. Carew and Musa took their children and old Cassy up to Inwood to see Mr. and Mrs. Wilks, and also to resume their charge of their ward, Samuel Carew, who, his guardian decided, should complete his studies in Germany.

They found the worthy couple moderately well and prosperous. Mr. Wilks's "Preparatory School for Young Gentlemen" was in quite a flourishing condition.

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Maggie wept happy tears over Musette, whom she declared she should have known anywhere by her beautiful eyes.

"Sweetest eyes were ever seen."

Maggie's conscience was troubled, however, about occupying the Brown Cottage—"trespassing," she called it, "living there so long without paying a cent of rent."

Musa assured her that she never should be called upon to pay, adding:

"I would give you the place in fee simple, Maggie, if I had not long ago given it to Musette. But Musette is an heiress now, and will never want it. And when she is of legal age to dispose of it, I know she will give it to you. Will you not, my darling?" said the mother, turning to the child.

Almost any child thus appealed to would have promised the gift, as a matter of course.

But little Musette understood and felt what she promised, and she answered earnestly:

"Oh, indeed I will, Mrs. Wilks. I shall *love* to give it to you. It is so pretty, and you like it so much."

The visit was necessarily a short one. And Mr. Carew and Musa, with their children and ward, and old Cassy, prepared to return to the city. In taking leave of the Brown Cottage for the last time, old Cassy delivered her sentiments as follows:

"I lived to be well on to sixty year ole, in peace and quietness, among my own people, and expected to die the same. But now, bless the Lord! ever since that time I have come to be a great trabeller in my ole days. Couldn't I write a book about it, if I knowed how? Umph! umph! Here I been goin' up and down on the yeth, and a walking to

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and fro on it, like old Satan in the days of St. Job, and doin' nuffin else, for the last ten year! 'Deed, I spects I 'll have to end my days amongst the speckled niggers on the Sandditch Islands, afore I die yet!"

The new Embassy to the Court of Austria sailed on the first of October, and in due course of time arrived safely at their destination.

His Excellency, August Carew, Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary, etc., etc., and Musa, Countess of Cressy, took their proper places at once in the court circle of Vienna. And the Countess became as celebrated in social coteries for her beauty and wit as the minister was distinguished in political cliques for state craft and diplomatic talent. Samuel Carew lived at a German University, but spent all his holidays and vacations at the house of the American Minister at Vienna.

And it was through the superior intellectual and spiritual influences and inspirations of that house and circle, that the honest and affectionate boy developed into a pure and noble man, worthy even of the love of the sweet maiden Musette, the love that was destined to bless his whole life.

Samuel Carew's inherited wealth rendered him perfectly independent of profession or place, but a life of idleness was not at all suited to his taste or to his ambition. So he read law at Gottingen, and made a specialty of the study of International Law.

When young Carew graduated from the University, Mr. Carew attached him to the Legation as an initial step toward that diplomatic career to which the ambition of the young gentleman tended.

After this, Mr. Carew and the Countess of Cressy remained abroad many years—he representing his Government, in succession, at nearly every Court in Europe; she

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shining in the highest circles by the glorious light of her beauty and genius.

Everywhere Samuel Carew accompanied them, fascinated by the spell of Musette's loveliness both of person and disposition, and every year rising step by step as a member of the Legation.

Musette returned his devotion with the purest love that seraph ever felt for man.

Musette herself was universally loved, and from her first appearance in society, which took place when her parents were at the Court of St. Germain, many noble and wealthy suitors sought her hand in marriage. Even a German Prince laid his royalty at her feet.

But this "maiden meek" turned away from her royal and noble suitors, and with the consent and blessing of her mother, she gave the priceless treasure of her heart to him who had been her life-long lover—"to him who in laughing childhood and ripe youth was ever hers." And so we will leave Musette, in a heaven of love that emanates from her own angel-spirit, and brightens and blesses all that come within her sphere.

THE END.

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